

PROPHETIC PREACHING THAT RAISES INTEREST AND AWARENESS  
FOR HISTORICAL RELEVANCE OF AFRICAN ANCESTRY:  
THE FORMATION OF SOCIAL ACTIVISM

John Edward Jackson, Sr.

B.S., Loyola University, Chicago Water Tower Campus, 1988  
MDiv, McCormick Theological Seminary, 2001

Mentors

Rudolph W. McKissick, Jr., DMin  
Harold A. Carter, Jr., DMin

A FINAL PROJECT SUBMITTED TO  
THE DOCTORAL STUDIES COMMITTEE  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
Dayton, Ohio  
May 2014

**United Theological Seminary  
Dayton, Ohio**

**Faculty Approval Page  
Doctor of Ministry Final Project**

**PROPHETIC PREACHING THAT RAISES INTEREST AND AWARENESS  
FOR HISTORICAL RELEVANCE OF AFRICAN ANCESTRY:  
THE FORMATION OF SOCIAL ACTIVISM**

by

**John Edward Jackson, Sr.**

**United Theological Seminary, 2014**

**Mentors**

**Rudolph W. McKissick, Jr. D.Min.**

**Harold A. Carter, Jr. D.Min.**

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Approved:

\_\_\_\_\_

Faculty Mentors:

\_\_\_\_\_

Associate Dean of Doctoral Studies



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	v
DEDICATION .....	vii
INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER	
1. MINISTRY FOCUS .....	4
2. THE STATE OF ART OF IN THIS MINISTRY MODEL .....	49
3. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION .....	54
4. METHODOLOGY.....	92
5. FIELD EXPERIENCE.....	104
6. REFLECTION, SUMMARY, AND CONCLUSION .....	119
APPENDIX	
A. WORKSHOP OUTLINE.....	126
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	179

## **ABSTRACT**

### **PROPHETIC PREACHING THAT RAISES INTEREST AND AWARENESS FOR HISTORICAL RELEVANCE OF AFRICAN ANCESTRY: THE FORMATION OF SOCIAL ACTIVISM**

by

John Edward Jackson, Sr.

United Theological Seminary, 2014

Faculty Mentors

Rudolph W. McKissick, Jr., D.Min.

Harold A. Carter, Jr., D.Min.

The project's aim is to create awareness and desire among members of TUCC to be encourage and empowered to learn more about the cultural and biblical precedents of social activism on behalf of oppressed people. The residents of Gary, Indiana is majority Black and oppressed. The writer will preach a sermon series that will illuminate social activism and oppression with the aim of inspiring a desire in members to become more aware of these precedents and how they affect their lives. There will be a quantitative pre and post questionnaire to document the results of the project among TUCC members.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The writer gives God the praise, glory and honor for being God! He gives thanks to God for his beautiful, supportive, encouraging and loving wife, Janiece N. Jackson. She is wind beneath the writer's wings, the angel at his side, and the joy of his life, without whom this work would have never been accomplished.

The writer thanks his three wonderful children Derrick L. Jackson, John E. Jackson, Jr. and Laniece N. Jackson for being a joy and inspiration in the writer's heart. The writer also thanks his five beautiful grandchildren Derrick L. Jackson, Jr., Dillon M. Jackson, Lauren K. Jackson, Mylove L. Jackson and Johnniecia O. Jackson. The writer also gives thanks to his siblings for their encouragement and prayers, Nedra R. Lewis, Jerald E. Jackson, Jeffery E. Jackson and Norma R. Jackson.

The writer expresses heartfelt appreciation and gratitude to the members of Trinity United Church of Christ-Gary. The writer would like to thank the four context associates Dr. M. Thandabantu Iverson, Sharifa Townsend, Reverend Carla Banks and Reverend Dr. Oscar Varnado who provided support, insight, critique and invaluable help in bringing this work to its fruition. The writer would also like to thank Ms. Michelle Legrand for tireless typing work on the project.

To Dr. Harold A. Carter, Jr. and Dr. Rudolph W. Mckissick who served as mentors for this project whom provided thoughtful guidance, constructive critiques and sagacious suggestions.

To program peer associates Reverend Kevin E. Donalson, Sr. and Reverend Oscar T. Moses for their collegial support, honest dialog, genuine fellowship and commitment to the ministry of Jesus Christ.

To President Dr. Wendy J. Deichmann, Dr. Harold Hudson and all the staff of The United Theological Seminary Dayton, Ohio for the work that they do to create scholars with a heart for the people of God.

To the writer's parents, Emerson J. Jackson (now deceased) and mother Eleanor K. Jackson words cannot express how thankful to God the writer is for parents like the both of you.

Finally to the Reverend Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr. the writer's "father in the ministry" and professional associate who's love, support, counsel, guidance, patience, generosity and wisdom made it possible for the writer to live out the calling of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to the Writer's parents Emerson J. Jackson (now deceased) and Eleanor K. Jackson as they planted the seed of excellence in the writer early in his life.

This work is also dedicated to the writer's pastor, father in the ministry and the magnetic north star of the writer's labors in the vineyard of Jesus Christ.

To Reverend Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr. You demonstrated how the ministry of Jesus is secular and sacred, holy and human, head and heart social and spiritual. You also modelled for me what it means to be "unashamedly Black and unapologetically Christian."

Finally this work is dedicated to all the unrecognized, unnamed, uncelebrated and under-appreciated African ancestors who were enslaved, who labored as domestics, as Pullman porters, as chain gang workers, as seamstresses, as cooks, as sharecroppers, and who endured disrespect, dehumanization, disillusionment, dispossession, disinheritance and denigration; but whose heads never bowed, whose spirits never broke and whose hope never died. As the writer of Hebrews says "The world was not worthy of them..."



## **INTRODUCTION**

Social justice and African and African American culture is a part of the religion of Jesus' involvement in social activism. Social activism is most certainly one of the most vibrant aspects of the Christian faith. The church is at its best is when it is a place where people find hope and help in dealing with the inequities of life. However, church attendance has been declining across all denominations and among every racial group for the past two decades. The religion of Jesus in every church is competing with technology that affords a person the opportunity to sit at home and be entertained by a seemingly endless variety of games, programs and information. The religion of Jesus is also losing members because of a lack of relevance in the lives of the average people who are dealing with overwhelming issues. Too many churches have become more entrenched in tradition, doctrines and dogma rather than engaging the problems that many people face everyday.

Americans are trying to recover from the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression which many economist blame on the greed of bankers and Wall Street. Yet Christianity as a whole has not been a central force in addressing the issue of greed among the top 1% in this country that threatens the quality of life among the lowest of the 99% in this country. The poor in this country are rarely mentioned by either political party when it comes to recovery as if they are invisible and the religion of Jesus has not seemed to be that voice for the voiceless agitating and advocating for the poor.

This Doctor of Ministry Project endeavors to help congregations reclaim the interest and awareness in their biblical/historical legacy of African activism in order to build stronger communities across the country while neutralizing oppression in whatever form it presents itself.

Chapter one chronicles the life of the author from early childhood through present day. It includes his spiritual journey and his call to ministry. Chapter one also features the writer's context. Information regarding the demographics of the church and its location are cited. A historical analysis of the context is provided. These sections provide a painted backdrop for the synergy that is included in the third section of chapter one. This section highlights how the author's life journey has prepared him for this challenge in his current context.

Chapter two examines the *State of the Art in this Ministry Project*. Expert and scholarly views and ideologies related to *Prophetic Preaching That Raises Interest And Awareness For Historical Relevance Of African Ancestry: The Formation Of Social Activism* are cited in this chapter. Dialogue with these experts and scholars will form the basis for problem solving in the current context of ministry.

Chapter three provides the foundations on which this project is based. The first section focuses on biblical foundations. Examples from both the Old and New Testament are cited to support the argument for biblical social activism and the eradication of oppression. In section two of this chapter, the issue of oppression and social activism is discussed from a historical perspective. Lastly, chapter three offers theoretical foundations based on the various works of several authorities who argue decisively on the issue of social activism and oppression.

Chapter four describes the methodology that emerged as a result of action research. It includes an explanation of different studies and surveys that were used in the project. This chapter explores the different tools used during the course of the ministry project and provides measures to evaluate the outcomes.

Chapter five lists the findings and results of this project. This chapter follows the writer's methodology in action. It provides a record of survey analyses, what tools were implemented, and what gains were achieved. The results of the project model have made a positive impact on the life of the church and will have exponential results, as the model continues to root itself in the life of the church.

Finally, chapter six presents a reflection, summarization, and critique of the ministry project. Recommendations for adjustments to the methodology are included as well as personal reflections on the overall journey. The project concludes with appendices that appropriately support the works contained within this ministry project.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **MINISTRY FOCUS**

I've told you all this so that trusting me, you will be unshakable and assured, deeply at peace. In this godless world you will continue to experience difficulties. But take heart! I've conquered the world (Jn 16: 33 The Message).

Trust in the Lord with all you heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make your paths straight (Prv 3:5-6 NIV).

#### **The Beginning**

The sum total of all my experiences and an abiding faith in God, has allowed me to walk in the calling that God has designed for my life. From biological parents who prayed without ceasing for me, to a spiritual father who ignited an unlit fire and to a faithful wife and patient family who shouldered my burdens, lifted dampened spirits and made me smile on the darkest of days, John 16:33 and Proverbs 3:5-6 have been my sacred refrain and shaped my journey. Seeking to be faithful to these precepts of the faith and working to create a ministry that honors God emerged a ministry for those who live on life's margins.

Born in Chicago, Illinois as the second eldest child of Emerson and Eleanor Jackson, family has been my core and foundation; the solid and unshakeable source that strengthens my resolve on weary days as the pastor of a church that believes wholeheartedly in fighting for the least of these.

My mother was a lifelong committed Presbyterian, and my father grew up Baptist, later he joined a Pentecostal church of the Holiness persuasion. These church experiences were the first significant influences on my life and future ministry. Our family simply fell into a committed routine of attending church. During the greater part of my childhood and teenage years, we attended my father's church because it had a vibrant youth ministry. After college, the Presbyterian Church became my place of worship, which led to me being ordained a Presbyterian elder.

As the second oldest child and the oldest son, protecting my younger siblings fashioned me to take responsibility. This role in the family came with great expectations of setting a good example. At times, though, the role, real or just perceived, caused me significant angst. Unknown at the time, the role of sibling protector laid the foundation for the skills needed to pastor the people God called me to serve.

Introverted growing into young adulthood, hiding my true emotions, I kept my feelings to myself, but I did talk to God as taught. The alone time allowed me a unique opportunity to establish a personal relationship with God in private moments. As a young man I found it difficult to share pain, fears and doubts with others, as a result I became a people pleaser, going out of my way to help others, making sure they had a friend but not letting them help me. Even now I struggle with sharing my stuff and being vulnerable. I am also finding these are not unique traits among ministers.

My penchant for privacy allowed me to develop an extroverted public personality as I participated in things all boys thrive on, such as playing football, basketball, courting' girls while trying to break every rule and not get caught. The natural inclination to be an introvert and to have cultivated and summoned the extrovert in me was a blessing and a

burden. I felt I had to succeed in whatever I did for my siblings and to keep pace with my friends. That was the blessing. I found pleasure in taking on difficult tasks and doing what others were afraid to try. The burden was learning how to lose, falling short and making mistakes. I have always felt like a trailblazer of sorts, one who breaks new ground.

I was named after my mother's father, John Devine Favors, and my mother's favorite brother Edward Favors—hence the name John Edward Jackson. My relationship with my maternal grandparents was perhaps the most defining experience of my life other than my bond with my parents. My grandfather, who stood no more than 5 feet 5 inches, was a giant man to me and to his family. He was deeply spiritual, a proud Black man who savored and appreciated his African ancestry. I listened with great intent to the stories my grandfather would tell me about his great grandmother, who he described as “pure African and a descendent of the Queen of Sheba.”

It was my grandfather who shared with me how his grandfather killed the three white men who raped his sister on a Georgia plantation on which they worked. He told me how his grandfather escaped through the Underground Railroad, that intricate web of churches and safe houses along the Northern path toward freedom. My grandfather even shared how his grandfather came to a shallow river and dismantled his shotgun to use the barrel to breathe through as he made his way underwater. My grandfather shared with me powerful moments in African American life that pushed against the oppressiveness of racism that excluded Black people. He spoke of the moment Joe Louis knocked out Max Baer in their second fight and the sense of pride Black people felt that resulted. My grandfather was the family griot, the one who shared both sacred and secular stories that

captivated listeners and transformed the hearer. He felt the need to share and pass on his tales and traditions to the next generation, that oral African narrative that is and has become so significant to our culture. My spiritual exuberance and my cultural energy are a result of his sacred seriousness.

My maternal grandmother was a true matriarch. She was a lifelong Presbyterian. Her grandmother converted to Presbyterianism while on the plantation in Mt. Pleasant, Tenn. My grandparents, like my mother and father, both attended different churches and were members of different faiths. My maternal grandfather was Baptist, while my grandmother was Presbyterian. Yet, my grandmother loved to move between churches, from the calmness and quiet of her Presbyterian worship experience, to the lively spiritedness of the Baptist church, to the liturgical Methodist church service, and finally to the fire-baptized filled with the holy ghost Holiness service, all in one Sabbath. She knew how to “remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy” (Ex 20:8).

It was while attending worship with my grandmother that I began to feel the power of the church, the press of the Lord, the sacredness of communing with the faithful, and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes while in the sanctuary with my grandmother, my eyes would water and tear simply from taking in all that was around me. On one occasion, while the pastor was preaching, he asked the congregation, rhetorically, “Who can deliver us? Who can save us? Who can make life worth the living?” I thought the church folks were struck dumb by some invisible force that rendered them speechless because they were obvious questions and no one said a word. So I summoned courage and gave the only response I thought appropriate. I yelled, JESUS! The congregation erupted and laughed at my youthful seriousness, and then the pastor said,

*Yes son, Jesus will.* That night, I overheard my grandmother talking on the phone to my mother and she said, *He's going to be your preacher.* Those words were like a prophecy on my life. And that moment has been the backdrop for all I have done and the divine prodding of God's spirit that I would resist and wrestle with for many, many years to come. I realize my story of running from my calling is not simply my own. When I listen to the elders of our faith, they often speak about how they ran but could not escape the long reach of the Lord.

Prayer. My prayer life was deeply influenced by my maternal grandparents. I remember easing quietly out of my bed one night because I heard voices coming from their room. When I peeked in unseen, they were on their knees holding hands while praying and asking for God's mercy for family members. It seemed like they prayed for hours. What I saw and what I felt, watching my grandparents praying together in the middle of the night, made me want to know the God they worshipped and to whom they prayed.

My family lived in an apartment on the South Side of Chicago on 78<sup>th</sup> and Evans Street when I was about age four. I had a special friend whose name I no longer remember. On this particular day, I had just watched an episode of Superman and I met my friend on our back porch. We lived on the second floor of the apartment and he lived on the first floor. As we talked about Superman, I started to explain how anybody who jumped off of a high place and who stretched their arms out like the man of steel, could fly just like he did on television. To my surprise my friend, who was about my age, began to climb the banister saying "Just like Superman?" I said yes, "Just like Superman." He



jumped off the banister and went straight down, luckily landing on the grass and not the concrete that was just a couple feet away.

I heard him hit the ground and he let out a painful cry. His mother rushed out of their apartment and found him balled up in pain on the grass. He told his mother and father that I told him be Superman and fly. My parents were both amazed and angry. I was baffled and scared. I actually believed what I was saying but was too scared to try out my theory. I also never thought I would convince him or anyone to do it. That was a pivotal moment in my childhood. By way of irresponsibility, I was given a window into the power of the spoken word. I also was given a preview of what can happen when one is reckless with what one says, no matter how passionate. I cannot say I learned a lesson that day but I had cause to use my power of persuasion many times since. Now, I am very conscious of what I am trying to encourage people to believe, lest someone take a jump off a high plateau on my word. We moved from that apartment about a year later but his parents no longer let him play with me.

When I was in the fifth grade I had an experience that has challenged me ever since. My fifth grade teacher, Mrs. Helen H. Holland, had me declared Educable Mentally Handicapped (EMH). It was not because of low grades, my grades were fine. In fact, I finished many assignments before others in the class leaving me time to play practical jokes often disrupting the students. In retrospect, I believe, that was the reason she labeled me EMH. My mother took me all over Chicago for testing to determine if Mrs. Holland's analysis had merit. I was put into the EMH class, a mobile unit, parked conveniently away from the school building, with all the other boys who had been

declared EMH. The classification stigmatized us in the eyes of our peers. We were the stupid ones.

We had one assigned teacher for the class, but each week there was a guest teacher who would talk to us. The guest teacher was often physically abusive to those classmates who were aggressive. Because we were in the mobile, unit no one questioned the methods used to discipline us. I never shared with my parents that our male teacher beat some of my classmates. I figured what was the use? I did not want to burden my parents, especially my mother who had to take off work almost every week to take me for testing required by the Board of Education so I could return to my regular class and curriculum.

At the end of the year, I returned to the regular classroom for the sixth grade. After three months in Mrs. Ramey' class, my sixth grade teacher, she happened to observe me between assignments drawing a comic book hero. She told me I had a talent for sketching and asked if my parents would mind if I had drawing lessons. I shared the news with my parents and they agreed. It was an interesting year, marginalized by one teacher and elevated by another. And one year later, I was no longer labeled and had a one-year scholarship to the prestigious Art Institute of Chicago.

My life has been shaped in so many ways by those two experiences. On the one hand, misunderstood, mislabeled and misjudged. On the other, having someone who saw something deeper and more complex and then took an extra step to help nurture what they saw.

I spent middle and high school years as one perpetual party. It was a nonstop epicurean and hedonistic saga. I was in constant pursuit of pleasure, from experimenting

with drugs, to sexual liaisons, going to one party after another, jail and multiple foolish decisions. All this took place during the height of the 1970s, and the Blaxploitation movie period, the age of the Afro, bellbottom jeans, platform shoes, phases in which I actively and wholeheartedly participated. I even had a perm in my hair in homage to the movie character *The Mack*.

On reflection, I was searching for myself, trying to find a way to be myself. I was still running. My Afrocentric-self was at war with my cultural-societal self that wanted to be included. My peers were more interested in the Negroid caricature of the culture. I needed to understand my true African-ancestored self. But in order not to be different, which meant being not cool, I played the part. I suffered during these years because my spirit was unsettled. I was directionless and a danger to myself and to others. I also could see in my parents' eyes and I heard in their voices, the strain of disappointment. I heard frustration in my father's tone and the look of pain in his eyes, seeing his first born son high and knocked out on the couch while a pot of hot dogs burned on the stove filling the kitchen with smoke. I did not know how to tell him I was just as frustrated as he was. I was supposed to be in control.

My father did not have a good relationship with his father and that made it difficult for him to express emotions. It came to a head one day when my dad took me to task about something stupid I had done. By then, I was a senior in high school and felt the urge to push back. I blurted out to him, "Why don't you ever hug us?" I knew he loved us but he did not know how to show affection. My father shot back an unexpected confession. "Because I don't know how, I never got it from my father!" I wanted to reach out and hug him but I just stared in shock. My dad never shared how difficult it was for

him with his father. I learned the story from my mother. Dad was from the old school where there were some things you just did not share as a man, especially to your children.

I knew then, that the loneliness I felt as the oldest male, my father also experienced. My father was the oldest of his siblings. He carried some intense internal burdens of his own. I told myself when I had children, especially sons; I would honor my father by hugging, kissing, and showing them open affection. Because my daddy had been deprived; in my ministry now, I have a drive to tell people how good they look, to hug, to smile and let folks know they are loved, appreciated and needed. It comes from my own need to feel loved, appreciated and cared for.

A year later, I would be challenged to follow through on my vow to show open affection to my children. In my second semester of college, while attending Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, Illinois, on a September afternoon, I received a call from my then girlfriend and now wife, that she was pregnant. I was devastated and went into immediate denial. Janiece and I had dated since she was in seventh grade and I was in eighth grade. I met her the summer before I was to enter Vacation Bible School's eighth grade class at my church. Her grandparents were members of the church and her older sister was helping with Vacation Bible School. My life would never be the same after meeting her, courting, dating and ultimately marrying Janiece Nadine Barney. We courted by phone over a year or two not seeing each other because she lived in the Robert Taylor Homes projects with her mother, and though the Robert Taylor Homes were nothing like they would come to be thirty years later, they still had a reputation of being rough and I was not brave enough to ride my bike from 8726 South Indiana to 4700 and State Street. So we spent three to four hours on the phone each night, though I was

supposed to be washing dishes. But we listened to The Ebony's' sing "Forever, that's how long I'm going to love you," or Redbone sing "Come and get your love," or even The Spinners sing another of our favorites "It's just you and me baby." We got on my father's nerves because there was no call waiting or call forwarding, or any such thing back then. If someone tried to call they would get a busy signal and that drove my mama and daddy up the wall. I always said when I was ready to get married and settle down and have children Janiece would be the one.

Decision time came that September afternoon with a single phone call. I dismissed her words by telling her I had to go. A few days later my mother called me and shared that Janiece called her as well. That really upset me because I intended to work it out on my own. My Mother's words did not comfort, cajole or coddle me. She convicted me in the way only my mother could, which is what I call, a sweet slap to the head through piercing words.

I did speak to Janiece after the deepest soul searching I had ever done. I prayed, telling God I did not know how to be a father but I did not want another man raising my son. God's spirit spoke to me and said, "You must be baptized!" Until then, my parents never forced any of us to officially join a church, though I always thought of myself as one of God's converts. However, at nineteen years old, away at school with a baby on the way, God's spirit spoke and said you must publicly demonstrate that you are mine by being baptized.

I was baptized, and in 1979 my first child was born, a son. In 1980, my second son was born, and I left SIU on academic probation to be with my expanding little family. Finally, in 1981 we were married and our daughter was born in November of 1981. With

my family complete, I went to work in a factory on the North side of Chicago while attending Loyola University at night to finish my undergraduate degree. I cannot say I saw God's hand guiding my life at twenty-three, married with three children. But I cannot say I had an idea of where I was going either. I can say, though, I felt the world weighing down and it seemed like a wilderness journey.

I knew God's presence was in my being baptized but it seemed like a moment that was fading. I did the only thing I knew to gain a sense of purpose. I got active in church. I never walked the aisle of Chatham-Bethlehem Presbyterian Church. I had never filled out a form stating my intention to become a member. I worshipped in my mother's church off and on for years but when I started attending regularly with my new family, it was as if I had been the prodigal son come home.

My thirst for studying the Word and worshipping soon garnered much attention and expectation. The church did not have many young adults in our age range. The children of many of the members when they reached their twenties found more lively churches. I found the attention and the affirmation I received a sort of elixir of hopeful energy. I taught adult Sunday school and impressed my students many of whom were high-level officials in the Chicago Public school system. I liked feeling that my theological energy and acumen put me on par with those who were at home in the halls of academia and corporate America. I was comfortable assisting the pastor in the pulpit, teaching and working in the church but I was not satisfied. I did not see it then, but God was leading me to a destiny God had planned and all I had experienced would come to bear—soon.

In 1988, I finally earned my undergraduate degree after ten years. This gave me hope I could get a position outside of the cloistered factory work in which I was engaged. It was during this time, while sitting on the steps of my home, my father shared words that blessed me. We were having a casual conversation and he said, "son, I am proud of you and I wish your brothers were more like you. You are active in church, have a relationship with the Lord and you are taking care of your family." I always knew I was an adult because of my age and the load I was carrying, but his words helped me understand in that moment, that I was a man.

In October of 1989, a year after graduating from Loyola, I became a Chicago Police Officer working exclusively in the city's housing projects. I never imagined being a cop but my desire to leave factory work and the promise of a decent salary with good benefits, made any hesitation I felt go away. I also reasoned this would be my chance to work with Black people and make a difference. I found God had the same intention for me to make a difference but God knew I would have to suffer while doing it.

I developed a particular style while serving and protecting that rubbed many of my colleagues the wrong way. I believed in listening to what the folks had to say. I believed that these people were basically good folks in bad situations. I also believed if I absolutely did not have to throw someone in the criminal justice system, I would not do it. I knew that system was unjust to African Americans and I did not want to feed the system if I did not have to. This was not acceptable to many of the officers with whom I worked. Many of them believed it was their job to arrest and that many (not all) looked down on the people in the projects. My dream of making a difference suffered greatly because of the resistance I got from other officers and supervisors.

In 1991, my father died from prostate cancer. If I were to try and craft words expressing how dead my soul felt during that time it would be as useless as chasing a feather in a hurricane. I thought my father was invincible and I never even entertained the thought that he might die. I lost the zeal for my job and it came to be just another necessary routine. However, just before my father died he told me something else that would strengthen my soul. My father was a man who seemed to feel best when he was helping someone. My father took time to listen to people and almost seemed to share their suffering. I asked my father on one occasion, "How do you help folks and bless folks even when they come to the hospital to encourage you?" He told me, "Because I have always known my purpose, son. Many people live all their lives and never know their purpose in life, I know mine." I have never forgotten those words and they guide me even today. His words helped me cope with his death. I changed churches when my father died.

By this time my wife and I had visited Trinity United Church of Christ to hear the powerful preaching and teaching of Rev. Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright Jr. and the soul reviving worship of the congregation. I had not yet healed from the death of my father, but more painful was the members of Chatham did not know how to help me heal. The Sunday after my father passed, I was teaching the adult bible class and one of the attendees said to me "John we are proud of you and you are handling things well." The truth of the matter was I was a wreck. I began to look beyond the veneer of ministry and I saw that church could be more ritual than relational. I had watched my mother, without the help of the church, pull the shattered pieces of her life back together and manage her new normal



without her husband of over thirty-five years. They were good people but did not know how to be the beloved community. That left a deep void.

As a young man of thirty-five years of age with anger issues concerning my father's death, and as someone who embraced his Africentric foundation, hearing Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr. was like an oasis in a very dry desert. When I listened to Wright, he took me on a journey through *my* history as an African American and pointed out things I had never seen or fully understood. Wright took me on a pilgrimage through the Holy Writ to uncover the nuggets that connected my story as an African-ancestored being to the biblical narrative.

I joined Trinity by myself, telling my wife later that night. For that was normal. I saw my mother and father worship in two different places with no problem and I did not want to demand or influence my wife to make a move she was not ready or willing to make, but the next Sunday she joined. When I joined Trinity I felt a great amen in my soul. Wright's Africentric and Christocentric approach to the study of scripture, made me feel as though I had found home and the bones of my ancestors, my maternal grandparents could rest.

What I received from them, my parents, from readings, to lectures by Afri-centrist like Dr. Molefi Asante, Dr. Asa Hilliard, Dr. John Henrik Clarke, Dr. Iva E. Carruthers, was a sense of African pride. What I had been lacking was a spiritual home where my African-centeredness and my Christ-centeredness could walk together without one being more important than the other. Trinity UCC became that home.

Throughout my life, as I reflect on what it has become, this is what stirred in me. This is what drove me, and this is what contributed to much of my acting out. I wanted to

be Black and Christian and to celebrate the long legacy of my forbearers who were at the center of the Biblical narrative and at the center of world history. Everywhere else, I had been told and expected to reduce, diminish and discount the truth of what Africans had contributed to world history and to theology. I was being forced to accept a double consciousness as W. E. B. Dubois referred to being Black in America. At Trinity UCC, I found a holy marriage of African-centeredness and Christ-centeredness.

At Trinity UCC, there was a vibrant children and youth ministry that my children could wade into and feel free to just be who they were. They were the featured children at our previous church because they were the few in attendance. There was a curriculum of Bible classes for me to explore. There were women's ministries, outreach ministries that my wife and I could be a part of and share in the transformation of lives. The words of my father wafted through my mind, "The Church is the one place in life where a person can come with any problem they have in life and find an answer to it." That theology has also been mine and I had found a representation of at Trinity UCC.

I started corresponding with Wright, at first by way of handwritten letters for e-mails had not reached the height of popularity yet. I wrote him about his sermons and shared with him my love for the study of my people. I wrote him and shared my desire for deeper scholarship, I told him about the elders of my family and the stories of our journey from their mouths to my ears.

I remember one letter I wrote concerning my confusion about one of his sermons where he indicated that Solomon's sons had fought over the kingdom after the death of Solomon. Wright responded in speedy fashion with a confession that he had been writing

too fast and made a mistake. I was astounded that he did not get mad at questioning his sermon and pointing out that he had made a mistake.

As a police officer Wright's counsel gave me courage in moments of crisis of conscious concerning being faithful to my commitment to Jesus Christ as opposed to the contradictory world of law enforcement. When I finally submitted to the calling on my life, Wright's words between the 11:00 A.M. and afternoon service demystified the call to ministry for me. When I was going through a marital storm Wright's compassionate presence and words kept me encouraged that God could do anything but fail. When I presented myself as a candidate to journey into unknown territory of starting a new ministry in Gary, Indiana, it was Wright's confidence in my abilities that helped me trust God as never before.

Wright has been the Gamaliel at whose feet I have eagerly sat. He has been to me personally and to my ministry like a magnetic northern star recalibrating my spiritual compass toward Jesus Christ during the most challenging crisis of my life.

I accepted the call to ministry in 1997 by way of two episodes but I was still wrestling with my grandmother's prophetic words. One Saturday while visiting my mother at her home I happened to answer the phone and it was my aunt, my mother's youngest sister. My aunt asked me, "When are you going to seminary?" I hesitated and then asked her why she would ask me such a question. She responded, "Oh, you are running." Then she said, "Johnny, everybody in the family has always expected you to go into the ministry." I was speechless. Then she said, "Johnny, your grandfather, my dad, believed he had it hard in his life because he did not follow through on the calling the Lord put on his life, so go on son."

I still did not share that conversation or my struggles with God's call. The very next Sunday while entering the sanctuary of Trinity, one of the men I prayed with each morning on our prayer line pulled me aside and said, "John, the Lord told me to tell you, go to seminary." With that, he left me and entered the sanctuary. That day, I made an appointment with Wright and poured my heart out to him. He advised me to enroll in seminary and I did.

Yet, this was my test to God. I told God if you intend for me to go into the ministry then Lord you have to make the way. I was a police officer with little money or resources and no time to take classes. I shared my financial problems with Wright and he advised me that Trinity had tuition reimbursement plan, but he would arrange for me to get mine up front because of my financial situation. I thought my lieutenant would laugh me out of his office after I told him I was going to seminary. Instead, he said, Done! I felt like Gideon, testing God to make sure it was God.

By my last year of seminary, I accepted the possibility of pastoring a congregation, but I was making good money as a cop. I had one child on his way to college and two after him. I told God I could not quit this job to work for a church that could not pay me so I could care of my family.

God and Wright fixed that as well. After ten years of working for the police department, my department was being discontinued, leaving 500 officers, including me, unemployed. Then while attending Trinity's annual revival in July of 2000 and still out of permanent work, Wright called my name from the pulpit during service and asked me to meet him after church in his office. I just knew I had done something wrong and I barely

listened to the sermon. After church, Wright asked me to join his staff as an associate pastor to the men.

In late 2003, Wright asked me to sit on a steering committee to help start a new church start in Gary, Indiana. My role was to simply sit on the committee. Wright had been asked by the leadership of the Indiana Kentucky Conference of the United Church of Christ to assist them in starting a UCC congregation that would serve the residents of Gary. The previous year Wright offered me a chance to pastor a church in Ohio because the neighborhood had changed from White to Black and needed new leadership. I prayed on it along with my wife, but I had to tell Wright I did not hear the affirmative voice of God.

When I was offered the chance to sit on the steering committee, I had not entertained the thought of pastoring a new church plant. I was excited about the opportunity to work on helping to start something from scratch. Somewhere between the end of 2003 and the summer of 2004, I was moved to candidate for the leadership of this new church.

However, the leadership of the IKC wanted the church to start the second Sunday of October 2004. Wright advised them that it would be detrimental to start the church without leadership, they felt differently and on the second Sunday of 2004 Trinity UCC-Gary had its first worship service. The first worship service occurred in a vacant school auditorium because the steering committee could not secure a vacant church building that was in good enough shape to hold a service. A minister and his wife who used it for an alternative school owned the building, though abandoned; they rented space to ministries that did not have their own building.

The steering committee had to depend on word of mouth. Wright used his television broadcast to announce that a new church was starting in Gary, Indiana. For that first worship service the auditorium was packed to over 300 people. Many attended because they thought Wright was starting a new church. People joined that day but there was no leadership so their names were not recorded.

The next Sunday, for the second worship service, there were less than 200 worshippers. At the end of the service, more people joined and again there was no leadership to take responsibility and so no one recorded the potential new members, and souls for Christ were disenchanted. By the third service the attendance had dwindled to less than fifty and Wright had become extremely concerned. He told the steering committee that it was "killing the church before it got started." He told them to have me preach the first Sunday of November. On the first Monday of November, I was voted to be the founding pastor of this new church plant; and the second Sunday of November, I stood as pastor to fewer than twenty people who gathered as we started our journey. I became pastor to a church on the decline before we could truly begin.

At this point in my life spiritually, I have become more aggressive in my expectations of what God can do. It is also a place of tension because my spiritual insight has taught me that God desires to do great things as Nehemiah says in Nehemiah 4:6 "When the people have a mind to work." My spiritual confidence is also in search of and in need of a community of the spiritually aggressive.

Intellectually, I was at a standstill. I have found it very difficult to keep my intellectual knives sharp when many in my congregation, most of the new and upcoming clergy and people in the community do not value, at least as much as I do, the rigors of

intellectual stimulation and growth. In the context of my ministry, I have yet to find a cohesive group to help shape my intellectual acumen, curiosity and the need to keep learning and stretching. I do have some colleagues who are invaluable in this endeavor though, the time we have to share has been limited because of distance, obligations, their duties as pastors and the stuff of life.

I am not a native of Indiana having been reared and raised in Chicago; therefore, after seven years of living in Indiana, I am now enjoying a deeper level of immersion into the life of Gary, Ind., socially and civically. I have helped to prime my social and civic involvement by working with other clergy, grassroots social and civic organizations in Gary and the surrounding region.

My family life has settled in the last seven years. My wife and I enjoyed empty nesting until the summer of last year when our adult daughter came home to live with us. She received her master's degree from Tuskegee University and wanted to move back to the Midwest in order to be in a broader, more cosmopolitan market to circulate her resume. Thank God she is working and able to fend for herself with the exception of having her own home. Life is good and the family is even better.

As a Black man in America, in the age of President Obama, I feel a sense of urgency. I enjoyed my fifty-third birthday on December 5<sup>th</sup> 2011 and with that came the importance of leaving a legacy of hope but also making a difference, right now. As a man, I feel I am best equipped mentally, emotionally and spiritually to make that happen. In November 2011, I also celebrated my seventh anniversary as pastor of TUCC-Gary. There was something sacredly strengthening about that milestone. I felt a settling in my soul that my members actually see me as pastor and not just preacher. With that

realization also came the overwhelming responsibility and an obligation to maintain their trust.

My wife and I are experiencing another phase of marriage we celebrated our thirty-first anniversary of our wedding on January 7, 2012. I feel I am a wiser spouse and less prone to let petty and insignificant things upset me. I have learned to appreciate the joy of having someone who loves me for me and who I love just because. I celebrate that I have raised three wonderful adults who are all in their thirties. I am grateful to God that God has allowed me to become a confidante, counselor and patriarch in my family. I thank God that God has also allowed me to become a grandfather.

The nuances of my ministry that I value are that of availability, able-ness and affirmation. People need to know you are available and reachable. I also believe I need to be prepared for fluidity of ministry. I think I have to be ready and able to do ministry in the gray areas of peoples lives because rarely are issues black and white.

The model of ministry being shaped in me is that of servant leader and wounded healer. I tend to feel at my best when I am among people making a difference in the lives of people. This model allows me the most joy while I serve. I have also been hurt, overlooked and discarded which has allowed me to understand the plight of the poor and the disinherited. I get excited knowing my ministry allows members of my congregation and community to feel appreciated, loved and believed. I am driven by the joy God places in my heart as I strive to follow in the footsteps of the incarnate Jesus.

I am hopeful my model of ministry will set the bar at a Jesus level for those participating along with me in ministry. I am encouraged my model of ministry will raise



the expectation level of others to rise to that level as well. I see it as a level of excellence where one does not seek perfection but gives one's best at every chance.

Those who have encouraged me to seek excellence are my parents. I am deeply indebted to my maternal grandparents whose lives were literal lessons of excellence. My third grade teacher, Mrs. Nicholas, who allowed me the creative freedom to create, write and direct a play for Black history month, also buoyed me. Mrs. Nicholas allowed me to paint outside the box and she listened to my wild ideas as she encouraged me in my passion of that moment. I am also indebted to my sixth grade teacher, Mrs. Ramey, who saw the gift for art and did something to enhance it by securing for me a scholarship to the Art Institute of Chicago. These two teachers exhibited what education and educators should be. The term *e-ducere*, which is where we get the word education, means to draw out. To draw out what is already in a person is what Nicholas and Ramey did for their students.

I also have been greatly impacted by two men who are truly friends. Lance Peeler and I attended the same high school and never had one conversation in our four years at Harlan High School. Yet, when we got to Southern Illinois University in Carbondale, Illinois we became inseparable. He has become a true brother and friend. He is a solid man of quiet strength, deep convictions and strong faith. He is like a guardian angel. I met the Reverend Oscar T. Moses in 1995 as a fellow officer of the Chicago Housing Authority police department. He is the brother, friend and confidante that the Lord placed in my life to challenge and encourage me in this work of ministry and life.

There are no words to express how much my father in the faith, Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr. has influenced, impacted and changed my life and ministry. All I can say is, I

will spend the rest of my life trying to make him proud. There are no words in the human lexicon to express my gratitude.

Finally, without my family, there would be no me. I have been deeply influenced and encouraged by my siblings and especially my life partner, my wife. She is truly my soul mate and is in tune with each beat of my heart, as I am with hers. There is a calming joy just knowing that God blessed me with her. There is an unspeakable joy knowing how God keeps on blessing me, even when I am unworthy. There is a song that Black church folk sing when we gather for worship and in some ways defines my journey. The refrain could be mine:

Through it all, through it all, I've learned to trust in Jesus.  
I've learned to trust in God. Through it all, through it all,  
I've learned to depend upon His Word.

Amen.

## **Context In Ministry**

### **Focus Statement**

Prophetic preaching that raises interest and awareness in the historical relevance of African ancestry for the formation of social activism in the congregation of TUCC.

### **History**

Pastoring in Gary, Indiana presents both challenges and blessings for any minister seeking to transform lives, connect with the community and deliver the social gospel to those seeking a deeper and more meaningful relationship with God and God's people. The researcher pastors Trinity United Church of Christ in Gary, Indiana and believes his church has been called to be a beacon for those living on the razor's edge and yearning

for a closer relationship with the One we seek to serve. At TUCC Gary, the pastor and his congregation strive to be the embodiment of the commission found in the Gospel of Matthew 25: 35-36, "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me."

In terms of African American history, Gary, Ind. has an interesting and tragic history. It is one of two cities to elect the first African American mayors in this country. Carl Stokes of Cleveland, Ohio was elected in 1968. Gary's first African American mayor, Richard G. Hatcher, actually took office before Stokes in 1968. Since that time though, Gary's plight has been less than laudatory.

The city of Gary was planned by the U. S. Steel Corporation when they were seeking to build a new plant that would one day become the city. However, to build the plant where nothing but scrub oak and sagebrush would grow, the steel corporation would also have to build a town from scratch to house expected employees.<sup>1</sup>

By 1910, Gary had grown from a population of 334 to at least 10, 000, which meant Gary needed to elect a mayor. With the city's rapid growth, the small African American migrants who had come for work were expected to leave after the city got on its feet but stayed instead. So from the early years, two Gary's grew and flourished one Black and one White.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup>Dharathula (Dolly) Millender, *Images of America: Gary's Central Business Community* (Gary IN: Arcadia Publishing 2003), 8-9.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 17-18.

The area designated for African American's was known as the Central District would later be called the Historic Midtown, which is where the church the writer pastors is currently located.<sup>3</sup>

The State of Indiana's population, according to the 2010 U. S. census was 6,483,802. The racial make-up of the state is: White 5,467,906; African American 591,397; Asian 102,474; AIAN 18,462; NHPI 2,348; Hispanic or Latino 389,707. The African American population is clearly in the minority, with the exception of the Hispanic and other population.<sup>4</sup>

There are ninety-two counties in Indiana and Gary sits in Lake County. The total population of Lake County is 496,005. The racial makeup is: White 319,412; African American 128,263; Hispanic or Latino 82,663; Asian 6,142; AIAN 1,628; NHPI 108. AS with the state, the African American populations in the county are clearly in the minority along with the Hispanic population.<sup>5</sup>

Located within Lake County of Northwestern Indiana is Calumet Township, which is one of the largest of the states 1,008 townships.<sup>6</sup> Calumet Township's total population is 104,258. The racial makeup is White 26,308; African American 72,575; Hispanic or Latino 7,325; Asian 313; AIAN 322; NHPI 17. When the lens narrows, the

---

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>4</sup>2010 U.S. Census.

<sup>5</sup>Stats Indiana, "Lake County Indiana In-Depth Profile," accessed March 2012, [www.stats.indiana.edu/profile](http://www.stats.indiana.edu/profile).

<sup>6</sup>Calumet Township Trustees, accessed March 2012, [www.calumettp-in.gov](http://www.calumettp-in.gov).

African American population is in the majority on the township level.<sup>7</sup> According to the U.S. census reports Gary Indiana reached its population peak in 1960 with 178,320.<sup>8</sup>

In 1968, Richard G. Hatcher was elected as Gary's first African American mayor. The event created an incredible backlash from Gary's white business sector and the majority of Gary's white population. The white businesses owners moved out of Gary taking their businesses to a cornfield South of Gary, which came to be known as Merrillville Indiana. This act set in motion a decline in Gary's financial infrastructure and left Black residents of Gary in dire economic straits.

With the business sector abandoning Gary, the steel mills either closing or downsizing, the major industry fueling Gary's economy being the steel mills, came the skyline of blight that is now a fixture in the cities backdrop. According to the 2010 census Gary had fallen in population to 80, 294. The racial makeup of Gary according to the 2010 census is as follows White 8,619; African American 68,107; Hispanic or Latino 4,128; Asian 164; AIAN 241; NHPI 8, with an unemployment rate of 9.8%.<sup>9</sup>

Gary also fell from being the largest city in Northwest Indiana to being the second largest giving the number one spot to Hammond, Indiana. When Trinity UCC-Gary began in 2004, the crime statistics were based on a population in Gary of approximately 100,637. In 2004, the violent crime stat was 677; murder and non-negligent

---

<sup>7</sup>2010 U.S. Census.

<sup>8</sup>1960 U.S. Census.

<sup>9</sup>2010 U.S. Census.

manslaughter, fifty-four; forcible rape, sixty-eight; Robbery, 346; aggravated assault 209 and property crime 5,117.<sup>10</sup>

In 2009, (stats for 2010 and 2011 not available from the FBI uniform crime report) the crime statistics were based on a population of 95,219; violent crime 661; murder and non-negligent manslaughter forty-nine; forcible rape forty-seven; robbery 289; aggravated assault 276; property crime 3,408. From 2004 to 2009 the crime stats for Gary actually went down despite the city still leading the state average in crime.<sup>11</sup>

There are abandoned buildings that litter the landscape, one grocery store serving the residents, and city services are almost zero. In the last few years, Gary has not plowed snow with the exception of the state plows, which will clear a few state roads that run along the city's major streets.

In 2010, the Knight foundation commissioned a study measuring the perceptions of residents to the local economy and basic Gary services. The study also gauged how attached residents were to the community. The key drivers for measuring were aesthetics, how the residents rated community parks, playgrounds and trails along with their appraisals of over all beauty and the physical setting of the community. Those living in the area were polled to see if they saw Gary as a place where people cared about each other. Another driver was social offerings.<sup>12</sup> Residents were asked how they saw nightlife

---

<sup>10</sup>USA Today/Nation 5/19/2011.

<sup>11</sup>Federal Bureau of Investigation, "FBI Uniform Crime Report," accessed March 2012, [www.fbi.gov](http://www.fbi.gov).

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

and the availability of arts and cultural opportunities. Residents were surveyed concerning their opinions of the openness and honesty of Gary residents.<sup>13</sup>

Residents were polled concerning the directness of college graduates seeking work and gay and lesbian persons and families with young children. Finally, residents were surveyed concerning their views on education. They were also asked about how they felt concerning the quality of the city's K-12 public schools, colleges and universities.<sup>14</sup>

All these categories received low marks from Gary residents, with the exception of those who thought it a good place to raise children and thought educational system was getting better.<sup>15</sup> The writer was very interested in the Knight Foundation conclusions. The findings indicated that city dwellers were less attached to Gary than those living outside of the city. Those who lived in the city and moved were more attached to Gary than those who remained. The study also showed that eighteen-thirty-four year-old residents were least attached, while those sixty-five and over were more and people ages thirty-five to sixty-four fell somewhere in-between.<sup>16</sup>

The study also revealed that people who have college degrees or post-graduate degrees have a lower attachment to Gary than those with just high school backgrounds. Income is another factor in attachment to the community of Gary. Those making less than

---

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

\$25, 000 per year have the lowest attachment to Gary than those who make \$75,000 or more per year.<sup>17</sup>

The data suggested a high level of apathy among many residents, stemming from the historical attitude toward the African American population that was made to feel unwelcomed to live in Gary. White business owners who left the community after the election of America's first Black mayor also exacerbated resident apathy. Lastly, the role of the national and local media has been brutal in the portraits of Gary as the murder capital of the country.<sup>18</sup> The stigma of being an extremely violent and blighted community has left festering wounds on the body politic of Gary residents who have often felt negatively characterized.

When Trinity United Church of Christ-Gary (Trinity UCC-Gary) was first founded the church worshipped in a school auditorium at 2700 West Jackson Street, a part of Gary's historic Midtown area (zip code 46407) where Blacks had been confined and/or congregated in the early years of the city's founding.

The Racial/Ethnic makeup of 46407 is as follows, White population, 372; African American, 15,261; Hispanic or Latino, 392; Asian, eleven; American Indian, fourteen; Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander, twenty-one.<sup>19</sup> The estimated median income for 46407 as of 2009 (the data for 2010 -2011 is not available) is \$19,599 while the state average is \$45,424.<sup>20</sup> Residents within 46407 whose income fell below the poverty level

---

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>"Gary Takes over as murder capital of US," Chicago Tribune, January 3, 1994, accessed May 5, 2012, <http://www.Chicagotribune.com>.

<sup>19</sup>"Gary Indiana Facts," accessed May 7, 2012, [www.citydata.com/zipmaps/Gary-Indiana](http://www.citydata.com/zipmaps/Gary-Indiana).

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.



in 2009 was 41.7% while the state average of persons whose income fell below the poverty level was 14.4%. Those residents whose income fell below 50% of the poverty level in 46407 in 2009 was 21.6 while the state average of those whose income fell below 50% of the poverty level was 6.4%.<sup>21</sup>

Trinity UCC-Gary being a United Church of Christ congregation (UCC) practices congregational polity, which means the church is autonomous. Congregational polity is a hallmark of the UCC that harkens back to its formation from four separate and distinct denominations, The Congregationalist, the Evangelical reformed, the Christian and the German reformed denomination. The Congregationalists joined in 1931, while the German Reformed and Evangelical merged in 1934. All merged in 1957, forming what is currently known as the United Church of Christ.

The United Church of Christ has over 6,000 congregations worldwide while about 300 of those congregations are African American congregations. African Americans joined UCC by way of the Congregationalist who were actively fighting for the abolition of slavery, primarily from the northern geographical areas of the country. When African Americans saw the sincerity of the White Congregationalist who fought for their rights, many joined the faith. African Americans also joined UCC through the Christian denomination that had churches on the southern slave plantations in the south. Some within the Christian denomination were covertly fighting to end slavery by participating in the Underground Railroad and encouraged the Africans to praise God freely without taking on European worship styles. When Africans experienced freedom in worship and saw that people were serious about ending slavery too, they joined the UCC.

---

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

Trinity UCC-Gary was a part of the growth plan of the Indiana-Kentucky Conference (IKC) of The United Church of Christ (UCC) voted in 2000 to build twenty new churches in the state by 2020. In late 2003, there was no UCC Congregation serving the citizenry of Gary, but with city being mainly African American and members of the IKC being majority white, the leadership of the IKC thought they needed outside expertise. The group sought the assistance of Reverend Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr. to assist with beginning an authentic African American styled worship and ministry.

Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr. who pastored the Trinity UCC Chicago congregation for over thirty-six years has a strong reputation in the UCC for his knowledge of authentic and creative African-centered worship. Trinity UCC Chicago under Dr. Wright's leadership grew from eighty-seven members in 1972 to over eight thousand active members in 2004, and 10 thousand on the roster of the church. Trinity UCC Chicago had to construct two buildings to house the rapidly expanding membership. Finally, under Dr. Wright's leadership Trinity UCC Chicago became the UCC's largest congregation and also assisted in planting a number of other Black UCC congregations either by sending former staff members like the writer or assisting with the development of other churches.

Dr. Wright agreed and then asked the writer to sit in on the steering committee to help get a Gary based church the church up and running. At the time, the writer was an associate pastor under Dr. Wright's leadership at Trinity UCC Chicago. The writer agreed and after halfway through 2004 the writer felt the call, not only be a part of the steering committee, but candidate to be the founding Pastor of Trinity UCC-Gary. Trinity UCC-Gary actually began having worship service before a pastor had been named because the

leadership of the IKC wanted to start services despite Dr. Wright's correct concerns that Black church going people want to know the pastor before they join.

Trinity UCC-Gary began holding worship the second Sunday of October 2004 in the Frederick Douglass School because there was either no other location suitable and willing to house a new church start at the time. The Frederick Douglas School had not been an active part of the Gary community School Corporation for several years. Reverend Bennie Simmons and his wife had been given the school building to use for alternative school and daycare, and rented to ministries like Trinity UCC-Gary who needed a place to hold worship services.

Trinity UCC-Gary had zero members, zero money and had to utilized Trinity UCC Chicago resources including the media services to advertise the church was beginning a new worship experience in Gary. When Trinity UCC-Gary began there were over 300 persons who came to experience this new church start and many curious to see if Dr. Wright would be pastor. However, because a pastor was identified by the first Sunday in November, attendance had dwindled down to fifteen to twenty persons.

The second Monday in November of 2004, the writer was selected to the new church and on the second Sunday of November 2004 the writer preached to a church that had no members, no money and to a bustling crowd of about ten to fifteen people.

Seven people joined that first Sunday to become a part of Trinity UCC-Gary. The auditorium was in great disrepair, there was no air conditioning in the summer and the heat worked sparingly in the winter, yet the handful of worshippers soldiered through the difficult conditions. Complicating matters, the Frederick Douglass School sat in the middle of a block ending in a cul-de-sac. Parking was very difficult, as members of the

neighborhood needed the parking places on the street. The school had limited parking in the back because of the potential danger of jagged rocks in unpaved areas. The school also had rodents and the rest facilities were still configured for elementary school children. The janitorial services in the school were very basic and members often had to assist in the cleaning especially, when Trinity UCC-Gary conducted worship or on special occasions.

Trinity UCC-Gary had two employees other than the writer, sound system man and a musician who were all paid from IKC, UCC grant money and Trinity UCC Chicago and weekly offerings. Trinity UCC-Gary held one Sunday worship service, Tuesday Bible class and choir rehearsal on Thursdays, which was the extent of church activities that could be managed in the building. Trinity UCC-Gary paid in the \$1,000 per month to Reverend and Mrs. Simmons. The church had no other custodial bills and was able to save consistently.

The UCC, IKC, Trinity UCC Chicago and members of Trinity UCC-Gary were planning to utilize other grants from the UCC, along with the offerings to build a first phase facility to attract more members. The steering committee knew, when a traditional church was built, membership would grow with consistency. Trinity UCC-Gary held worship consistently each Sunday and experienced modest growth from the seven who joined in November of 2004 to roughly between fifty and sixty-five members in 2008. The average weekly attendance on Sundays was between twenty-five to thirty parishioners. Yet, in January of 2008 the steering committee (who were governing the affairs of the church and consisted of the writer, the associate conference minister for the Northwest association of the IKC, and seven other members of the church that the writer

had chosen) were able to identify some vacant property several blocks away from the school in which Trinity UCC-Gary were holding worship services.

The land was ideal because it was in the same geographical area of the Historic Midtown section and offered the opportunity to expand without having to relocate. In March of 2008, Trinity UCC-Gary broke ground on the site and construction was completed by October of 2008. Trinity held its first worship service in the 300-seat new facility. The class spaces are multi-purpose, allowing three classrooms to be converted into space capable of holding 100 people comfortably.

Membership has grown slowly but in a steady fashion in the three plus years since to around 175 members on the church roster and having 125-145 on Sunday mornings. Trinity UCC-Gary has developed a successful weekly Soup kitchen that serves meals to fifty to 100 persons on any given Saturday. Trinity UCC-Gary donates 200-250 Thanksgiving baskets to needy families, complete with turkeys for the past three years. The items for the baskets are donated by members of the congregation, assistance from Trinity UCC Chicago, contributions from the community and the utility company serving Indiana, NiSource.

Trinity UCC-Gary conducts a clothing give away quarterly to the community of coats, clothing items and shoes. Trinity UCC-Gary even has a prom dress give away complete with on-site alterations. Trinity UCC-Gary has partnered with a white UCC congregation Immanuel United Church of Christ in Highland Indiana who sent seamstresses and contributes with clothing items, to do this effectively. The prom dress give away is not just for prom dresses but gives elegant attire to teenage and young adult women from the community each spring.

Trinity UCC-Gary has a social justice ministry called, In the Heart of the Community that addresses the social, political and economic policies of the community of Historic Midtown, the city of Gary Indiana, nationally and globally that adversely affects the poor persons of African ancestry. The In The Heart of the Community, has held forums to address the burden of high utility bills to residents of Gary, letter writing campaigns in opposition to the Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, petitions to members of the state and federal legislative bodies in support of the Sudanese people on the continent of Africa, to teach concerning the universal declaration of human rights and organizing to fight the Republican governor of Indiana's attempt to dismantle collective bargaining by unions in the state through the Right to Work legislation.

Trinity UCC-Gary at present has one worship service on Sunday, one Bible class on Tuesday (although the writer has facilitated as many as two at a time), prayer service on Wednesdays, Choir rehearsal on Thursdays and monthly movies with a message installment every 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday of the month. The movies with a message are in collaboration with a local grass roots activist organization called The Central District Organizing Project (CDOP). The mission is to educate through entertainment or *Edutainment*, persons in the congregation and community about African and African American heritage, complexities and share incites concerning the diversity within Africans on the continent and in diaspora. The movies are movies made by and about Africans and African Americans, which also allows the church to financially support Black businesses.

A Board of Directors called The Council of Elders governs Trinity UCC-Gary. The Council of Elders works with the pastor to conduct the business of the church and to

set church policy and procedure. The pastor and Council of Elders also present proposals to the congregation for vote to either approve or disapprove. Presently, there are seven persons serving on the Council including the pastor. The members are chosen by the bylaws and the pastor to serve the council for two-year terms. The council is made up of the Assistant Pastor, the Chair of the Deacons, the Chair of the Trustees, the Chair of Grant Writing/Policy & procedure, Chair of the Leadership Council, a Young Adult representative and the Director of Christian Education.

Along the way, Trinity UCC has experienced the perplexity of how to pay the mortgage in an economic recession that has swept the country. Trinity has had to grapple with being part of a relatively unknown denomination (The UCC) in a city that is historically and heavily Baptist. Gary has about 300 congregations with over two-thirds being in one of the nine Baptist conventions and the rest a mixture of Methodist and Pentecostal churches.

Trinity has also worked through the highly emotionally charged cultural war being waged in the wake of the 2005 UCC vote to affirm gay and lesbian marriage. The UCC practices congregational polity where each congregation is autonomous and is not dictated to by the national body's votes, views and values. Despite being autonomous it still has been a challenge in a heavily biblically conservative region.

Trinity UCC has also weathered a media-created backlash from being a church whose motto is "Unashamedly Black and Unapologetically Christian." That is, perhaps, the biggest battle with which Trinity UCC-Gary has had to deal. Despite Gary being an overwhelmingly African American populated city, the religious conservatism does not allow for a Black and Christian theology.

Trinity has been labeled That Black Church. Clergy, lay and city politicians have told the writer on numerous occasions that to be too Black sends Red Flags. The membership of Trinity are encouraged to wear traditional African attire on Sundays, support the Umoja Karamu service instead of a traditional Thanksgiving service and celebrate Kwanza and Christmas, which has further caused a sort of apoplexy. To be honest, it has caused difficulty with some of the members of Trinity to merge the African historical biblical culture with the religion of Jesus Christ.

The other area that dove tails off of the cultural aspects of the ministry is the emphasis on practicing a socially relevant gospel. The scriptural evidence of Jesus announcing his ministry in Luke 4:18-19 with these words, "The spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners. Recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." The community still finds it challenging to marry political activism and salvation theology in sermon or worship.

Trinity UCC-Gary is in a very prophetic place and time for its brand of ministry focus. For Gary to be the first city to elect the first African American mayor seems fitting. However, Gary is the city that hosted the National Black Political Convention in 1972. The convention marked a turning point in Black political participation first by bringing together an eclectic group of people from the arts community like Imamu Imiri Baraka, the activist community like the widows of Dr. King and Malcolm X, the Reverend Jesse L. Jackson, Sr., Black political community like Richard G. Hatcher to the religious community of all faith traditions. The only group that was excluded from the Gary meeting was white people.



For many years after African Americans worked to carve out a Black agenda that would challenge both political parties and ushered in the largest influx of Black elected officials since Reconstruction. The reverberations are still being felt because without the National Black Political convention of 1972 there would not have been the foundation to elect the first African American President of the United States, President Barack Obama.

For these reasons and more, the writer truly believes that God is preparing a Black Phoenix to rise requiring people to learn how to truly understand their historical purpose while continuing their spiritual and biblical destiny to be a voice on behalf of the oppressed. Trinity UCC-Gary therefore is in a prophetic moment in time to help usher this renewal of minds, restoring of hope and resurrecting of a people starting from Gary, Indiana. Signs of this spiritual moment have already happened. On January 7, 2012, Gary, inaugurated the first Black female mayor, Karen Freeman-Wilson.

Many in the city, the region, state and country see her election as a shift in the political conservative mindset of Gary, a hopeful sign to some, that on the horizon Gary maybe about to experience a resurrection. Trinity UCC has a motto and vision statement that says, "We are not just another church, but we are a culturally conscious, Christ centered church that is committed to the community." Trinity stands as a herald of hope and hands of help to the work of Jesus in uplifting those who are the disinherited in our city and around the world.

### **Synergy**

Throughout their sojourn in America, Africans have been taught the separateness of themselves from Africa and Africans. The teaching has been so ingrained that even in those communities, which are most African there is the greatest scandal of being African.

The writer's experiences and context in ministry have a number of areas that give the writer confidence and affirmation that he is in a good place for ministry. The writer has spent the majority of his life studying and sharing the African Biblical heritage in a majority African American context.

The context in ministry of Gary, Indiana is a majority African American context that has a wealth of history of African American people who have acted on their own agency to help uplift African American people in the area of Gary and beyond.

The writer has also faced challenges in teaching, preaching and lecturing on the hope that comes when African American people embrace the historical reality that they have been major players in world history and in particular the biblical narrative. The challenges have come from those of other ethnic groups in particular people of European descent but also, more importantly from people of African descent in America.

The writer has found that it is hard for people who have experienced perhaps the worst form of subjugation in history known as chattel slavery where in their very humanity and identity were denied them by the law of the land to now embrace that they are biblically prominent players in God's purposes.

It is difficult for African American people to see hope in themselves as people of African descent when all that they have been taught is that African people were doomed to the lowest rungs of society and have no culture or role in the biblical narrative other than hewers of wood and drawers of water.

In the context that the writer pastors the challenge of ethnic amnesia is real and rigid. The people of Gary, and the neighborhood that the writer's church sits in is a very prime example. The writer's church is in the Historic Midtown section of Gary, where the

vast majority of Black people were relegated to by the white power structure. Like other segregated areas of North America, Black people were a community within a community and had to learn to take care of themselves. In this context the pride and hope in the abilities, talents and accomplishments of Black people were at a premium because the outside dominant culture would not recognize them and acted as if Black people were invisible except when it came to using Black people as servants.

However in the presence of white people Black people in Gary and in other parts of the country have chosen to keep the little pride they had in themselves out of sight of whites fearing retribution from those whites who historically saw Black pride as a sign of arrogance or impudence.

Therefore the major instance when Black people in Gary publicly and more importantly politically exercised their self-determination and belief that they could govern their own destiny by electing the first Black mayor in America, they have summarily been punished ever since.

The punishment came from the business sector and the state governmental wing. The church that the writer pastor's is a church that expresses its Africanity and Christianity as equals in the life of Africans living in America. That has created some ridicule from those who are uncomfortable and/or resistant to expressing their African cultural pride biblically and historically.

Yet there is a large segment of the city that is hungry for this type of affirmation, *who they are and whose they are*. When Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr., Pastor emeritus of the Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago had his sermons on the local Christian network on Monday nights, many if not most of Gary, Black residents tuned in regularly.

Dr. Wright's preaching and teaching ministry was and is African centered and socially conscious. The fact that residents of Gary were so faithful to this type of preaching and ministry model demonstrates that the writer is in fertile ground.

The writer's congregation started from no members, no money and no established rituals or routines. The benefit of this context is that members along with the pastor can create a fresh new vision for ministry in Gary. Gary is a city that has a number of old churches that are steeped in tradition. The challenge in this context is that many people have ceased to attend these traditional congregations because the context has changed from the way things used to be. Members who have come to the writer's congregations represent those who are looking for a context that is more relevant to their needs and the present 21<sup>st</sup> century context they live in.

Members of the writer's congregation have expressed the hunger for ministry that stimulates the mind, addresses the political, social, economic, and educational lack of cultural reaffirmation that is absent in the other religious traditions in Gary.

Gary is the city that hosted the historic National Black Political Conference of 1972. This conference brought together thousands of politicians, artist and activist from all over the United States to set a Black political agenda to be presented to both Democratic and Republican parties. This gathering was the first and only of its kind and to date has never been duplicated. From this historic gathering a wave of Black elected officials came into being. This moment in Gary has been credited with the movement of Black people all over the nation electing Black officials to lead their communities.

The writer finds this fact of history extremely compelling for the kind of ministry he is cultivating. The national Black Political Convention of Gary demonstrates a subversive spiritual current that runs beneath the surface of the consciousness of the city. To have the Black Political Convention of 1972 required that the thousands of people who descended into Gary be housed. Gary at that time only had one hotel, which only had four to five hundred beds. Where would the majority of the people stay who came to Gary? The answer is, they stayed in the homes of residents and many arrangements were made through the churches in Gary. This shows the historic Black church at its best since slavery, Jim Crow and during the civil rights revolution of the 50's, 60's and early 70's.

Having this type of historical precedent also gives the writer reaffirmation that the writer is building upon a solid foundation of African Christian ingenuity and creativity. The writer has spent most of his life studying how the Black church kept its Africanity and Christianity to uplift the souls of Black folks, to quote the title of W. E. B. Dubois.

The early Black church in America before emancipation took the name African in naming their churches. A good example is the African Methodist Episcopal Church organized by Richard Allen in 1794. In the writer's present context, there is a stream of this latent social, cultural, spiritual and biblical mindset for the writer and his congregation to draw from.

The writer is in a denomination that is majority white, yet has a history of fighting for the marginalized in society whether that be in the abolitionist movement, suffrage rights for women, the poor, gay & lesbian, mass incarceration of minorities, illegal wars abroad and/or emigration justice. This presents some challenge in a state that has a

history of racism against Blacks by some whites and a state that is fundamentally conservative in its theology.

However, the writer's church being in the United Church of Christ also gains the credibility of showing how Black and white can be supportive of one another's cultural identity, and to quote Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr., to "Not see different as deficient."

Members have told the writer that seeing white Christians as concerned about liberation as they are and supportive of our church being African centered was encouraging.

Gary like a number of communities across America has more people who do not attend any church and who were not raised in the Church. This afforded the writer's church an opportunity to redefine what evangelism means. Too often the word has turned people off because of the connotations with the exclusion of women from the pulpit, the colonization mindset of some missionaries who offered gospel paternalism and right wing zealots who fought against voting rights.

Gary is a community of families who emphasize relationships. People in Gary have historically valued interaction with one another. Gary has a history of outdoor gatherings from high school sports, music, parades to summer events like the annual airshow that draws people together.

This context gives the writer's congregation another experience to build a social conscious, liberation gospel model of ministry. The drive to gather people together is an opportunity to create ministry that goes beyond the doors of the church so that the community can see a body of believers willing to follow in the footsteps of Jesus Christ who set the standard of taking the church to the people. It is also a model seen in the Acts

of the Apostles at the birthday of the church when people gathered together to care for one another, provide for each other's needs and comfort one another.

The historic Midtown section of Gary in which the writer's congregation sits already has a history of African self-determination in a context of racial segregation that fits the writer's experiences.

The residents of the historic Midtown section of Gary already has in it's history examples of the merging of their Christianity with a political, social and economic action mindset to bring healthy wholeness in the body politic of the people of African ancestry in Gary. The writer has spent the majority of his life examining liberation models of ministry and preparing himself to practice ministry with this mindset among people the writer is assigned to pastor.

The congregational polity of the United Church of Christ along with the social gospel mindset of the United Church of Christ is a comfortable fit for the writer's congregation who are accustomed to a polity that allows each congregation to be autonomous. The fact that the United Church of Christ is a majority white denomination allows the writer's members to experience a liberation gospel in a diverse setting of people. The writer believes this is important because it provides affirmation to the writer's members that they are not alone in seeing the relationship between their faith and the struggle against oppressive policies.

The writer believes that the area of connection between his experience and his context encourages ultimately a sense of hope. Hope in their ability to live a relevant faith that addresses the political, economic, educational and social impediments they face Monday through Saturday. Hope in a praxis that allows them to be active participants in

continuing their own history of self-determination and passing on this model to the next generation. Hope that will build the ministry of Trinity UCC in Gary to be a place of witness to the transforming, liberating, power and love of the religion of Jesus the Christ.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **STATE OF THE ART IN THIS MINISTRY MODEL**

The biblical, historical and theological foundations played a significant role in the final design of this project model. The biblical foundation was essential to the project because as a United Church of Christ (UCC) congregation, scripture is the only rule of faith and practice as delineated by the approved characteristics of the United Church of Christ denomination. The Old and New Testament of the Protestant Bible serve as the foundation for how the community of faith that serve Trinity UCC-Gary interact with one another and the larger society.

For preaching to happen effectively, scripture must be at the center of the proclamation moment. Understanding of scriptural interpretation requires proper exegesis for congregants to understand the historical context, setting and the people to whom the text was written. Everything that happens at Trinity must have a biblical foundation. The writer has attempted to challenge the congregation in appreciating the scriptures as a living word that has relevance for their present day affairs though the Bible is a book of books that has been compiled over centuries.

The writer therefore has chosen scriptures from the Old and New Testament that illustrate the core issue of the writer's proposition that social justice/activism, and cultural identity are essential in the propagation of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The scriptures will be addressed in the project both implicitly and explicitly in a series of sermons that exegete what the scriptures have to say concerning the writer's proposal in expectation that they will serve to help raise interest and awareness in the proposal by congregants. The hermeneutical lens that the writer utilizes in the process of exegesis is the same lens that informed prophets like Moses, Joshua, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Hosea, Amos, Micah and was seen in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. That hermeneutic is a lens that affirms the liberation and freedom of all people who are made in the image of God from all forms of oppression by other humans.

It is the task of the historical foundation to illuminate how the biblical narrative has been illustrated in the lives of individuals throughout history. The historical lifts the scriptural record from the pages of holy writ into the real life experiences of the persons in the congregation of Trinity UCC-Gary. One means of communication that brings about identification to people of African ancestry in America is story telling.

The Africans who were brought to one of the three Americas and who were the ones who were the central subjects of the scriptures were and are an aural and oral people. On the continent of Africa story telling was just one of several means of communicating values, principles and morals in the community. Yet in the Americas the slave owners denied Africans the human right to express themselves in written form. Slaves were also denied the right to read though slaves clandestinely did both away from the watchful eye of slave owners.

Therefore Africans in slavery sang songs with coded meanings and told stories that were laced with a subversive spirituality. Therefore, the historical analysis and personal anecdotes that the writer utilizes serve as a way for members of the writer's

congregation to see themselves acting out their faith. It is a way for the congregation to gain clarity in understanding the relationship of scripture, God, faith and the struggle for liberation from oppression.

The historical foundation will therefore be utilized in the writer's project to allow the congregants to not just identify with the personalities but also cultivate interest in how they are practicing their faith as individuals and as a community while also generating awareness of the need for more social activism among themselves.

The writer will identify a few names and life experiences both from scripture and history whose experiences will serve as the clearest window to see the proposal of the writer.

The theological foundation is the third piece of the puzzle that is connected to the writer's project. Theology is basically God talk or how people discuss the activity and meaning of God in human affairs. Therefore, the writer will bring into the sermonic moment some of the insights of the theologians that the writer has used in his work.

The theological foundation addresses the heart of the writer's project because theology is at the heart of what rituals, routines and rites are practiced in any given congregation. Theology gets to the follower of any faith's belief system. Theology is the mechanism that members of any faith tradition use to understand themselves and the world they live in. Theology informs followers of any religion who and what has value in their society. Theology is a way people try to discern the mind and intents of God.

Therefore the theological foundation is meaningful to the writer's project because it challenges the members of the congregation to realize that they have a developing theology and that it is important for their living out of their faith.

The writer will allow the congregation to hear thoughts from the theologians and how these came to understand God, faith, religion and their life in the way that they, the theologians used have presented it.

The theological foundation is meaningful in that it illustrates how a person is socialized with other persons. How one sees God, is one's theology. One's theology then instructs how one sees one's self, which is anthropology. Finally one's theology informing one's anthropology will ultimately instruct one in how they see other people and relate to other people, which is one's sociology.

If one understands their God to be a God who penalizes people for not having enough material and economic resources and if that God approves one race above other races then depending on what class one was born into will determine how that person is valued in the society. This paradigm will determine who receives resources, compassion and approval in that society.

Depending on the view of God of a person or a group of persons in a society will determine how that society is ordered and who is treated as important members of that society and who is marginalized, disenfranchised and demonized.

The theology of the slave for instance and the theology of the slave master, were not the same theologies. One theology allowed human beings to be dehumanized in a system of perpetual servitude as it was thought to be pleasing to that view of God that approved it. While the other minority view of God allowed those dehumanized to still care for their master's infant children because despite the horrors that the children's parents meted out on them, they were still humans who deserved nurturing. This also

despite the fact that those same children would grow up feeling entitled by God to demean their slave nannies.

The theology of the persons in the writer's project will assist the members of the writer's congregation to understand the *why* of what is/has been done in our faith tradition, denomination and congregation and understand how the writer utilized that logic in his project.

Therefore the writer will reference the theologians used in this work, and allow those theologian's words and work to illuminate the sermonic moment. The writer will also query the members of the congregation before hand to ascertain if they are familiar with the theologians used and offer another query at the end of the project to try and discern the interest level of the members of the congregation after hearing propositions of the theologians used.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS**

#### **Biblical Foundation**

There is no knowledge of Yahweh except through God's Political activity on behalf of the weak and helpless of the land.<sup>1</sup>

When one examines the biblical narrative of both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, there are a number of examples of the struggle of oppressed people from oppressors. Commentators, theologians, artist and activist have documented the liberation theme that runs through the scriptures.

The examples in scripture show that not only is Yahweh unhappy with the subjugation of his people but Yahweh summons the assistance of members of the oppressed group (or a call narrative) to mount a campaign of resistance against that oppressor with Yahweh's backing.

The writer will identify selected portions of scripture to illustrate this pattern where Yahweh demonstrates displeasure when people in particular the poor, the powerless and weak are disposed, disallowed and disinherited. These texts will show that Yahweh addresses his displeasure with a person in order for that person(s) to announce, advocate and agitate on behalf of Yahweh to change the condition causing the oppression.

---

<sup>1</sup>James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 59.

In the Exodus and in particular the call of Moses, Yahweh appears to Moses in a theophany to communicate his displeasure with the oppression of his people at the hands of their Egyptian overlords. Exodus 3:7-8 reads:

Then the LORD said, I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians... (NRSV).

The above quote is one of the prime examples of the liberation theme throughout the Old Testament. This text in Exodus has also been a staple in the struggle by African American resistance against chattel slavery, Black codes, Jim Crow, segregation, and second class citizenship in America. The 400-year oppression of the Hebrew people in Exodus mirrored the oppression experience African Americans felt in forced servitude in America.

The other portion of the text demonstrates that Yahweh seeks someone from his people to assist Yahweh in overturning of that oppression to change the conditions causing that oppression. In Exodus 3:9-10 Yahweh continues:

The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt (NRSV).

It is informative to identify the reason for Yahweh's displeasure that caused Yahweh to appear in a theophany to Moses. The mistreatment of people is the identified reason. The text does not give any other reason for God to reveal God's self to Moses other than social activism on behalf of those who were being oppressed by the actions and policies of the government of Egypt.

In the book of Judges there are a series of leaders who are called by God to save God's people from the oppression of other nations.

The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, forgetting the LORD their God, and worshiping the Baals and the Asherahs. Therefore the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of King Cushan-rishathaim of Aram-naharaim; and the Israelites served Cushan-rishathaim eight years. But when the Israelites cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the Israelites, who delivered them, Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb's younger brother (Jdg 3:7-9 NRSV).

Despite the fact that the people in the text had displeased God and God put them in the hands of oppressors, the text reflects the similar theme of Exodus and Isaiah 61 that says *“When the Israelites cried out to the LORD, the LORD raised up a deliverer for the Israelites...Othniel.”*

This deliverer was to save the Israelites from oppression. Judges list a number of instances in this same pattern where the people fall into oppression, they cry out to God, God hears their cries and raised up a deliverer/savior to bring them out by God's power.

The book of Judges consist of a series of popular tales that tell the story of the free tribes of Israel resisting foreign oppression... What all these Judges has in common was their role of Freedom fighter... As with the earlier Hebrews, the outstanding characteristic of the biblical judges was not their religiosity. Rather, the main qualification for biblical Judges was a willingness to fight for their people's freedom.<sup>2</sup>

In Isaiah 61 the prophet announces good news on behalf of Yahweh and that good news is the liberation of God's people from various forms of oppression by the prophet or Messianic figure. This theme is very similar to the one addressed in Exodus. Isaiah 61:1-2 read:

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn (NRSV).

---

<sup>2</sup>Obery M. Hendricks, Jr., *The Politics Of Jesus: Rediscovering The True Revolutionary Nature Of Jesus' Teachings And How They Have Been Corrupted* (New York, NY: Three Leaves Press, 2006), 17.



Jesus quoted the first verse of the above text in his inaugural sermon at his home church as he announced the theme of his ministry. Social activism of one's people is at the heart of the Old Testament where God's displeasure with the oppression of God's people and God seeks a person from that group to help lead the fight to change those conditions.

It is the writer's contention that there is a seamless thread running throughout the Old Testament that has as its central theme the liberation of God's people from oppression, which is a social justice act. That theme has within it that under the weight of suffering politically, economically and socially the people cry to God for help and God responds by identifying an individual(s) to be God's assistant to alleviate the suffering of the people.

It is also the writer's contention that the deliverance of the people by God through an individual(s) is not based on religiosity, evangelism or conversion per se rather that God is displeased with injustice and oppression of the weak by the powerful.

Justice or treating people respectfully, humanely and lovingly is the central concerns in this theme. Providing for the needs of the powerless and most vulnerable are at the heart of God's advocating and interceding in the lives of God's people. It is important to the writer to note that in the previous biblical examples, the text describes God's initial reaction to the oppression of God's people as displeasure, even anger when God's people are being oppressed. This suggest that there should be a level of anger, rage and extreme discomfort when people are under a system of systemic suffering at the hands of those in power.

Amos records God's displeasure with the aristocracy of Israel,

I hate, I despise your festivals, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.  
Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not

accept them; and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals I will not look upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps Am 5:21-23 NRSV).

God's displeasure will not accept religious rituals that do not address the adversity of the average person. The text suggest disconnect happens when people can worship God without working to make life fair and just for the most vulnerable in the community. In this text of Amos, God rejects all the forms of religiosity because it does not flow from a sense of right relationship with God by doing right in relationship to the poor.

The text culminates in the words, "But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Am 5:24 NRSV). Amos' words indicate that there has to be a focus on liberating the poor and oppressed from the shackles of systemic injustice before one can truly be in right standing with God. According to the text, God has great concern for those who are being subjugated so that those in positions of authority can enjoy ease.

In fact, the Priest Amaziah, who is a mouthpiece for the oppressive government of Jeroboam King of Israel, challenges Amos. In Chapter 7:1-16, Amaziah contends against Amos' words of warning to the wealthy. Amaziah goes as far to suggest that Amos speaks only to get paid,

And Amaziah said to Amos, "O seer, go, flee away to the land of Judah, earn your bread there, and prophesy there; but never again prophesy at Bethel, for it is the king's sanctuary, and it is a temple of the kingdom" (Am 7:12-13 NRSV).

To which Amos responds with his call narrative that follows the model the writer lifted up in Exodus where a reluctant member of the oppressed group is raised up by God to speak on behalf of God against the oppression of God's people.

Then Amos answered Amaziah, "I am no prophet, nor a prophet's son; but I am a herdsman, and a dresser of sycamore trees, and the LORD took me from

following the flock, and the LORD said to me, 'Go, prophesy to my people Israel (Am 7:14-15 NRSV).

In Micah the responsibility to do something about injustice, servitude and oppression is expressed in terms of a mandate.

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? (Mi 6:8 NRSV).

The text the writer has examined suggested that any form of injustice, oppression and systemic suffering of people is despised by God. The text also suggests that in God's displeasure God seeks someone from the oppressed group to speak for God against the perpetrators of that oppression.

Unlike Isaiah, Micah was neither of noble descent nor a native of the capital city. He came, rather, from the common people, bring a citizen of the small village of Moresheth in the Judean foothills southwest of Jerusalem. Therefore, Micah looked upon the corruptions and pretensions of the capital through different eyes... Micah stands solidly with Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah as a fierce champion of pure worship of the Lord and of social justice, and he shares with them both the word of judgment against God's own people and the promise of divine forgiveness and hope in a future restoration.<sup>3</sup>

The text suggests two things; first that God will chastise God's own people when they fail to address the adversities of the poor and disadvantaged among them. God in these situations seems to direct the brunt of God's displeasure with the aristocracy, which includes not only the political system but also the religious hierarchy as well. God holds the priest, prophets and officials to the higher standard of being the vanguard to protect the weakest in their community, the widows, and orphans, poor and destitute. When the religious, political and officials fail to defend and include the poor and weak in a share of the resources, the text suggest no amount of religious rituals or public piety can assuage

---

<sup>3</sup>Bruce M. Metzger and Roland E. Murphy, eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: Containing The Old And New Testaments* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994), 1190.

God's displeasure and even anger. The second point that the text suggest is that to not speak out on behalf of the dispossessed, and disinherited among them, to refuse to lift a hand to do something about oppressive situations in the community, city and country in order to help liberate those suffering oppression is not only a requirement by God, but a pre-requisite to being in right relationship with God.

There is a subtle suggestion that being in good standing with God means how one stands up for the least in the community. There is a subtext that suggests forgetting where one has come from and forsaking the people one has encountered is a form of blasphemy against God. Throughout the Old Testament, God reminds the people of the covenant and what God had done to rescue them from oppression, slavery and humiliation to arrive at a point where those same people turn around and oppress the weak among them bringing about separation from God.

However we shall see that this separation from God by way of detaching one's self from their responsibilities to care for those in one's community, fight for the weakest of the land, and even sacrifice to help save the oppressed from despair is not limited to the Old Testament.

We begin with the simple historical fact that Jesus was a Jew...The second important fact for our consideration is that Jesus was a poor Jew...The third fact is that Jesus was a member of a minority group in the midst of a larger dominant and controlling group. In 63 B.C. Palestine fell into the hands of the Romans. After this date the gruesome details of loss of status were etched, line-by-line, in the sensitive soul of Israel, dramatized ever by an increasing desecration of the Holy Land.<sup>4</sup>

Bridging the gap created by self-centered greed that actually helped to cause suffering among the people carried over as a concern for God into the New Testament in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth.

---

<sup>4</sup>Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1976), 15-17.

Jesus said, "For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Mk 10:45 NRSV). These words of Jesus were in response to two of his disciples, James and John's request to being elevated to positions of prominence when Jesus the Messiah's rule was to begin. Jesus had to remind them to not take on the mindset of those who ignore the plight of the poor and oppressed by seeking status, stature and social and political standing in life. The subtle suggestion again is that to be close to God means being focused on the needs of the oppressed and meeting those needs first.

Jesus' inaugural sermon exemplifies this point even more directly as he quoted from Isaiah 61 while attending worship in his hometown.

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor (Lk 4:16-19 NRSV).

The above text gives tangible substance to what it means to "have the spirit of the Lord, or be in the spirit or be filled with the spirit of the Lord." Jesus' testimony about his connection with the spirit is directly related to social justice action on behalf of those who are being oppressed in various forms.

Secondly the text leaves little doubt of the mission and mandate of the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Salvation as the text suggest is not just a religious release from spiritual sin, but the liberating of others from social, political, economic and cultural oppression. There is a connection that Jesus brings into view that reflects to Exodus 3,

and the very reason that God got involved with the lives of the people who were in bondage in Egypt.

Jesus put himself in that same mindset, mission, and mandate, that the people are being oppressed by the powerful, and he connected to God to do something about their suffering. His connection to God seems to compel him to social justice on their behalf.

The ministry of Jesus is the energy that leads to the radical beginnings precisely when none seemed possible... The birth is only a hope; but the ministry is where the possibilities of hope must seriously engage the world of despair. Jesus is presented and trusted as the one whose very person made a difference.<sup>5</sup>

In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus seems to offer to those who are of the under-class of society a counter to the narrative of despair concerning their condition. Jesus turns what could be viewed as dishonor and offers honor, nobility and hope to the emotional, psychological and physical characteristics of the plight of the powerless. Jesus does this by attaching a series of blessing to what others might deem burdens.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.  
 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.  
 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.  
 Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.  
 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.  
 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.  
 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
 Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account (Mt) 5:3-11 NRSV).

Attaching the word *blessed* to what the oppressor intended to be a burden can be seen as a subversive way to cultivate a revolutionary personality to a people under oppression. If Jesus can get the people to change the way they understand themselves and

---

<sup>5</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 105.

reject an oppressors definition of their condition, the people are not far from mobilizing against the oppressor for their own agency.

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd (Mt 9:36 NIV).

This quote from the gospel of Matthew illustrates a deep concern for the condition of people under oppression. The word *compassion* demonstrates that Jesus had a deep concern in the very pit of his being for the condition of the people. It tells us that the people were *harassed and helpless*, which suggest that they had been set upon by an overpowering force and the people were powerless to defend themselves.

The people in this text need a defender, they need a liberator; someone to champion their cause. The text allows us to see the praxis of Jesus' words in Luke 4:16-18, where he announced the direction in which his ministry would take place. He is concerned about the poor, the oppressed, and the underclass.

On reaching Jerusalem, Jesus entered the temple area and began driving out those who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the benches of those selling doves, and would not allow anyone to carry merchandise through the temple courts (Mk 11:15-16 NIV).

In the above text Jesus exhibits extreme anger at an economic system that fleeced the poor. The most egregious aspect of this system is that it is under the auspices of the religious elite who are conducting a criminal operation of extortion. In a culture where people lives are ordered around the temple as their central symbol of faith, were being charge to participate in the religious rites could be seen as criminal.

Jesus takes on the mantle of liberator of the people from economic oppression by not only speaking up for the poor, but also acting to put a stop to that system. It is important to also notice the length that Jesus went in the temple to liberate the people

from economic oppression. Jesus in this instance used physical force and demonstrated his anger by turning over tables that had been used to collect oppressive fees from the poor. It suggests two things; first, when the religious institutions aids, abets and profits from a system of economic exploitation of the poor and powerless is especially upsetting. The temple, the religious structure should be a place of hope and help according to the example of Jesus and profiting from the poor triggered Jesus' anger.

Second Jesus' example suggests that there are times where physical force should be used to stop a system from taking advantage of the powerless. These two aspects, then, would offer a template of social justice for the followers of the religion of Jesus.

Then the righteous will answer him, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you? The King will reply, I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine; you did for me (Mt 25:37-40 NIV).

In the above text, the implication is that the pre-requisite to eternal life is what one has done for the marginalized minority of a society who are under oppression. Jesus calls them least of these. The implication of not having done something to alleviate the adversities of the poor means that one cannot experience eternal life with the Lord. The text implies a litmus test for salvation to those who claim Jesus as leader and Lord. Jesus makes the point in the text that one's actions or lack thereof to help those most in need is in reality what one has done or not done to him. Jesus makes the pre-requisite personal and expects his followers to take the needs of the helpless as a sacred obligation.

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from



time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need. Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet (Acts 4:32-37 NIV).

In the days, weeks and months after the ascension of Jesus, the disciples made great strides in spreading the faith in Jesus of Nazareth. They testified under the power of the Holy Spirit; Peter preached a sermon that drew 3,000 people to the religion of Jesus; they faced down the religious authorities that sought to stifle the religion of Jesus.

In the above text, the followers of Jesus are all together as a community and behave in a way that counters the oppressive greed of the society around them. They do not see their possessions as something to be held onto and hoarded but shared. They willingly sell land and property to give to the leadership to be distributed to those who are in need. The community seems to be made up of people in all areas of the economic stratum.

Those who have wealth like property are in the group and those who have neither property nor wealth are within the group, but there is no sense of class-consciousness among them. The outcome of a community that refuses to rank people by possessions, family background, or status in society offers balance.

This experience of the early church community offers a glimpse of what the outcome of the fight for social justice could resemble when the lowest in a society are elevated in importance.

Obery Hendricks makes a profound observation,

Thus, by telling his disciples to bring the people's needs before God, Jesus taught them to treat the people's needs as holy, that is, with reverence and respect and special care. He made clear to them that using their strength, their gifts, their spiritual ministrations to make this a just world was the most important service

they could render to God. He taught them to serve God by making sure that everyone has enough daily bread, that everyone is free from economic violence and exploitation; that everyone is delivered from the clutches of unjust kingdoms, principalities, and powers. In this way Jesus showed that the salvation that his followers must strive for is the salvation of all.<sup>6</sup>

The writer has emphasized the teachings of Jesus because as the head of the church, what Jesus taught and did would become a mandate for those who follow Jesus. It is extremely instructive to examine Jesus between his birth and death and what Jesus fulfilled from the social justice stream found in the Old Testament and where Jesus's ministry points to in the New Testament.

James the brother of Jesus echoed the focus on advocacy found in the Old Testament texts, and in Jesus' example in his letter to followers of Jesus of Nazareth.

What good is it, my brothers; if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead (Jas 2:14-17 NIV).

James makes it very clear that there is a sacred responsibility to tangibly demonstrate what one believes in the religion of Jesus. James uses as an example the kind of action that should accompany one's faith such as taking care of the need for clothes and food. This example shows continuity with Jesus' appeal on behalf of the least of these and the focus of Jesus' inaugural sermon in Luke 4:16-18.

The texts from James through the Old Testament suggest that God is concerned about needs of people suffering systemic oppression. God, according to various texts shows displeasure when people are being unnecessarily burdened by a society that uses poverty to profit from such as God expressed to Moses in Exodus.

---

<sup>6</sup>Hendricks, *The Politics of Jesus*, 110-111.

The life of Jesus shows us that he expressed his harshest anger against those who used the poverty of the poor to profit by keeping them in perpetual oppression. Jesus' example also provides a litmus test for his followers that they are not to be on the side of oppressors and that for one to enter eternal life with him, they would need a reference letter from the poor.

In the Revelation to John on the island of Patmos the words of final judgment from God reflects the words of Jesus in Matthew 25:37.

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books (Rev 20:12 NIV).

The dead are judged not by what they said, but by what they did in life, which also reflects the standard that James, the brother of Jesus set for the followers of Jesus in his letter.

John also saw a new reality for the people of faith in his letter.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Rev 21:1-4 NIV).

The text implies that there is an ultimatum to the work of liberation and social justice, where all forms of suffering are completely eradicated from the lives of God's people.

When the text says, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes..." resembles Exodus and the lives of the disciples of Jesus; God's hand of hope, comfort and joy will come through the working hands of the people of faith in God?

## Historical Foundation

Restoration of African civilization is not possible without a return to African spirituality.<sup>7</sup>

A people losing sight of origins are dead. A people deaf to purposes are lost. Under fertile rain, in scorching sunshine there is no difference: their bodies are mere corpses, awaiting final burial.<sup>8</sup>

Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God" (Ps 68:31KJV).

The social justice and liberation struggle of people of African ancestry in America can be said to have started with the various forms of resistance displayed to avoid capture on the continent of Africa. It can be seen in the willingness of some Africans to choose death by drowning as some jumped overboard on slave ships rather than face servitude in an unknown land with a strange people. Others chose to fight back as observed by those aboard the *Amistad* as it set sail from a Cuban harbor one night in 1839.

On the third night of the voyage, when a fierce thunderstorm covered the noise and distracted the crew, Sengbe [Pieh] used the nail to pick the locks on the neck irons. Wielding large cane knives they found in boxes on board, a group of captives attacked the crew.<sup>9</sup>

However in this particular case, though the captives took control of the vessel, later the ship was taken back. The Africans did however win their court case and were sent back to their native land.

---

<sup>7</sup>Jacob H. Carruthers, *Intellectual Warfare* (Chicago, IL: Third World Press, 1999), xv.

<sup>8</sup>Ayi Kwei Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons* (Oxford, NY: Heinemann, 1973), xiv.

<sup>9</sup>Joyce Hollyday, *On The Heels Of Freedom: The American Missionary Association's Bold Campaign To Educate Minds, Open Hearts, And Heal The Soul Of A Divided Nation* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2005), 6.

The struggle for liberation and social justice has been going on among people of African ancestry for a very long time, and it did not dissipate once captive Africans were sold on auction blocks in the Americas.

In North America, African people saw their faith as a means by which to fight against the oppression of slave owners. The Africans first had to use their own spiritual sifters to strain what was useful in the white oppressors version of the Christian faith and discard what was not before they could incorporate it into their lives. L. H. Whelchel makes the point:

The uniqueness of the Black church is found in the way enslaved Africans took the hybrid Christianity offered them by their oppressors and made it relevant and meaningful to their needs. Historically, the Black church started out as an "invisible institution" without walls, without written doctrines, without pompous and ostentatious displays and without sanction from White authorities. it was conceived and delivered in the hearts of a people who were struggling to come to terms with the most difficult of circumstances.<sup>10</sup>

This raises the understanding that the fight for equality by people of African ancestry has not only been a fight for justice but also a fight for identity. The assault on Africans in America has had a two-pronged attack; one point was to rob African people of basic human rights in the society thus defining them by law as inferior but also to deny them the right to define themselves. This second part of the two-pronged attack has been prosecution by discrediting what history has recorded about people of African ancestry with distortions of Eurocentric greatness. It has been driven by an educational system that put everything European at the center of civilization and ignoring the contributions of

---

<sup>10</sup>L. H. Whelchel, Jr., *The History & Heritage of African-American Churches: A Way Out Of No Way* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2011).

African people. This is what the late Carter G. Woodson would call in his book of the same title, *The Mis-Education of The Negro*.

W. E. B. DuBois described the striving of Africans in America is perhaps most clear when he wrote in 1903 his classic work, *The Souls of Black Folk*.

It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two un-reconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.<sup>11</sup>

Into this backdrop described by DuBois, the Black church was born, and with it, the struggle for social justice and cultural identity; both of which are the flip sides of the same coin of liberation for Africans living in America.

First the writer must make note that social justice and liberation were a constant theme on the minds of Africans held in bondage in America. This can be understood when listening to the sorrow songs or spirituals that were sung during slavery. There is a line from one song entitled "Oh Freedom," that illustrates this point, "Oh, Freedom, Oh freedom, Oh Freedom over me, and before I'd be a slave I'll be buried in my grave and go home to my Lord and be free!" Seeking social justice was a constant striving for Africans living through the slavery experience, The Black codes, Jim Crow and second class citizenship.

In 1787 Richard Allen and Absalom Jones were thrown out of St. George's Methodist Church because of racism. However, before Richard Allen started the African Methodist Episcopal church, he and Absalom started the Free African Society in 1787. What is unique about the Free African Society is that the name itself reflected an

---

<sup>11</sup>W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls Of Black Folk* (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1994), 2.

intentional African consciousness. It is also unique that the Free African Society's focus was both secular and sacred according to Gayraud Wilmore in his book, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*. Wilmore writes,

The interests of the Free African societies were both religious and secular, and never became exclusively one or the other. They created, therefore, the classic pattern for the black church in the United States—a pattern of religious commitment that has a double focus: free and autonomous worship in the Afro-American tradition, and the solidarity and social welfare of the black community.<sup>12</sup>

Richard Allen's example demonstrates the focus of many of the early Black religious leaders and their congregations. They felt they had to minister to the internal spiritual needs and address the external social, political, economic and educational needs of the people. The society into which they were birth did not value the external needs of the people and was not concerned about the souls of a people that were seen as inferior. The church became the place where the needs both spiritual and secular were met. The church could do this because it had the biblical narrative on its side from the experience of the Hebrew people in Egypt to the incarnation of Jesus in Palestine. The church also had the autonomy to step into this role because it was independent and autonomous.

As seen above, Richard Allen seized upon this opportunity to bring the spiritual and social needs of African people under one roof and address those needs as an intentional strategy of ministry. In 1794 Mother Bethel is formed in Philadelphia and the seeds of the African Methodist Episcopal Church are planted which also laid the Foundation for African Methodism throughout the world.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup>Gayraud S. Wilmore, *Black Religion And Black Radicalism: An interpretation of the religious History of Afro-American People*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis bBooks, 1983), 82-83.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 83.

Bishop Henry McNeal Turner of the AME church is another who saw the church as an institution to bring together the secular, the spiritual and cultural in an effort to bring deliverance to Africans in America. Bishop Turner not only supported the emigration of Blacks back to African but also was the first to raise the issue of reparations to Blacks from the U.S. government to redress years of slavery and to pay for the emigration of Blacks to Africa.<sup>14</sup>

The writer believes that Bishop Turner saw that African people in America had to be nurtured in their own cultural context in order to develop a sustainable unity of what Africans had in common. The writer also believes that Bishop Turner as well as Bishop Allen saw this as the best way to heal the soul of a people, while fighting for their rights.

It also appears to the writer, that from Bishop Allen to Bishop Turner, worship was seen as fuel for the work of social justice on behalf of African people in America. This view of church and worship reflects an activist view of the ministry of Jesus instead of an apathetic view. One inspires congregants to be participants in their own deliverance instead of only relying on prayer and God to change systems for them.

Bishop Allen's legacy is that of self-determination among a people who seemed to have everything against them and little help from well meaning whites. Yet, the same people allowing their faith to fuel them, their African culture to unite them, and their activism to free them, left a ministry model for Bishop Turner and many others after him to replicate. At its best, the Black church has been the center of life for the Black community. There has never been a movement for equal rights, human rights or social justice that the Black church was not at the center of. Samuel DeWitt Proctor in his book,

---

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 123.



*"The Substance of Things Hoped For* explains the significance of Abyssinian Baptist church of Harlem, New York, under the leadership of Adam Clayton Powell, Sr.

[Dr. Powell] brought a passion for social justice and personal renewal to the church[Abyssinian]. Under his stewardship this modest-sized black church moved to Harlem in the 1920s, and became one of the largest Protestant congregations in the world, with a membership well over its current seven thousand. The church became a social service agency as well as a vital religious center."<sup>15</sup>

The social justice and cultural connection to church and ministry represents a view from the bottom and not from the top. As the writer has pointed out in the scriptural references used from Exodus to the earthly ministry of Jesus, the view of God's relationship to humanity is seen from the vantage point of the oppressed and not the oppressor. This would suggest that people who have experienced privilege over another group of people would not readily connect with a biblical view that calls their privilege into question. Whereas those who have known suffering, going without, the politically, economically and socially locked out will not only understand but identify with Jesus' words in Matthew 25.

Then the king will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' And the king will answer them, 'Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me (Mt 25:34-40 NRSV).

---

<sup>15</sup>Samuel DeWitt Proctor, *The Substance of Things Hoped For: A Memoir of African-American Faith* (New York, NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1995), 146-147.

And those who had known neglect, suffering and being downtrodden would see justice in Jesus' words of condemnation to those "Who had not done it to the least of these..." The necessity of a social justice culturally focused method of ministry has to be seen from the perspective of those who have been disinherited. Such is the heart of a conversation that Samuel Dewitt Proctor had with Evangelist Billy Graham one day in 1965.

Dr. Graham [Dr. Proctor recalled] felt that his business was to preach the gospel and change the hearts of individuals. Changed persons would then change society. I countered with the teachings of Jesus in chapter 25 of Matthew's gospel, in which he admonished that at the Day of Judgment we would all be separated into sheep and goats. One got to be sheep by feeding the hungry, giving water to the thirsty and clothing to the naked, visiting those in prison, and taking in the stranger. The sheep entered into the master's joy. Goats did not do such things and were consigned to a burning hell. Graham smiled and said that i was making Jesus a "liberal." It was odd, though that while he officially avoided political involvement, he often boasted of advising several presidents.<sup>16</sup>

Reverend Graham in the above conversation had lived a position of privilege while Proctor had been brought up understanding the pain of those who suffered systemic inequality. Proctor's ministry, wherever he practiced it, would be a tool for him to help liberate the lives of those under oppression. Proctor read the biblical narrative from the perspective of those who were telling their stories in the bible and they were the oppressed.

The ministry of Martin L. King, Jr., was deeply rooted in the tradition of the church and the Black church experience. King was a fourth generation preacher in the Black church. It is an understatement to say that Dr. King's ministry helped to move the church from the seats to the streets. The writer would suggest that the majority of persons

---

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 123.

who have heard about Dr. King know him by his public work of fighting for equality, economic justice and civil rights and few people that have heard of him can tell of a single pastoral duty that garnered him praise from his church parishioners.

Dr. King did pastoral duties as much as he could as pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist church in Montgomery, Alabama and as co-pastor with his father at Ebenezer Baptist church in Atlanta, Georgia. Yet the ministry of Dr. King is known for merging spiritual accountability with social responsibility. It is also important to note that Dr. King's ministry of non-violent social action began as a response of resistance against the subjugation and second class citizen treatment Black people had been dealt in Montgomery Alabama in the Montgomery bus boycott that catapulted Dr. King into the national spotlight. In this way his ministry acted to mitigated the suffering Black people were enduring because of segregation, exploitation and racial hatred from whites, but also militated against acceptance of that suffering by Blacks who were either afraid to stand up for themselves because of a lack of political power, or who were too comfortable to care about others because of a middle class mindset, and against white racist beliefs of superiority over Blacks.

Dr. King had stinging criticism for the church and people in the church who did not grasp the sacredness of utilizing spiritual power to engage oppressive political policies. In *Testament Of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, edited by James Melvin Washington, Dr. King makes this observation concerning the church in his sermon, "A knock At Midnight" from Dr. King's own book *Strength To love*.

If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority. If the church does not participate

actively in the struggle for peace and for economic and racial justice, it will forfeit the loyalty of millions and cause men everywhere to say that it has atrophied its will.<sup>17</sup>

Dr. King also was driven to address calls from fellow clergy in Birmingham, Alabama to slow down the push for equal rights and *wait* to allow things to change on their own in the south. Dr. King's answer to the clergy of Birmingham was composed in the "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" originally on the fringes of a newspaper.

Dr. King's Letter from a Birmingham jail addressed white clergy who seemed more invested in keeping the status quo, rather than using their moral mandate to make peace for all the citizens. Taylor Branch says "He [King] presented his most scathing accusations as a confession,"<sup>18</sup> to the white clergy of Birmingham. King began this particular portion of the letter in this way "I must make two honest confessions to you, my Christian and Jewish brothers. First, I must confess that over the last few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate...who is more devoted to order than justice..."<sup>19</sup> and then King closes with his second confession to the white clergy saying that "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I can't agree with your methods of direct action; who paternalistically believes that he can set the timetable for another man's freedom..."<sup>20</sup>

For Dr. King, the fight for social justice and equality was deeply rooted in his biblical understanding as witnessed to the many references he made to Old Testament

---

<sup>17</sup>James Melvin Washington, *Testament Of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1986), 501.

<sup>18</sup>Taylor Branch, *Parting The Waters: America In The King Years* (New York, NY: Touchstone, 1988), 740.

<sup>19</sup>Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (New York, NY: Mentor, 1963), 84.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 84.

prophets like Amos. Dr. King not so subtly placed his own ministry on the biblical canvass of Moses in his last sermon in Memphis, Tennessee when he paraphrased the last experience of Moses in the words “I’ve Been to the Mountaintop...” For Dr. King the fight for social, economic, political and educational justice was deeply rooted in his understanding of the biblical narrative from Moses to Jesus of Nazareth. For Dr. King, it was how the church acted on her faith and demonstrated the radical liberating love of Jesus of Nazareth.

Yet in Dr. King, we get a picture of the church and social and cultural activism that looks almost solely from the trenches and not so much from the life of a congregation and pastor moving from the seats to the streets. We do not see through the lens of Dr. King’s ministry how membership in the churches he pastored were motivated to merge the social and the spiritual; we do not see how pastor and parishioner developed ministries that would teach the inseparable nature between social liberation and spiritual motivation Dr. King lived so profoundly. Dr. King’s ministry became so national and international that little attention was paid to how he cultivated members in his pastorates to see the connection between being saved to serve the social needs of those suffering.

The writer believes that the model of a social justice focused, culturally centered, biblically based congregation and pastor is best seen in the ministry of the Reverend Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr. and Trinity United Church of Christ (UCC) in Chicago, Illinois.

To understand how the focus and ministry of Trinity UCC and Dr. Wright were forged together requires a little background on the congregation of Trinity. For the first ten years of its existence (from 1961-1971), Trinity United Church of Christ (TUCC) was not a church that embraced its African heritage and was not welcoming to those who did.

TUCC was a church that interpreted integration as Black people shedding their African forms of worship and taking on a more sedated European form of worship befitting an upwardly mobile middle class congregation. Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr., says of TUCC,

At the end of 1971, Trinity United Church of Christ was not related to the community in which it sat at all, outside of its Sunday morning worship services, which were not inviting... There were no programs in ministry that related to the community. There was no bible study to which the general public was invited. There was still the attitude that only a 'certain kind of person' was welcomed at Trinity United Church of Christ."<sup>21</sup>

TUCC did engage in the fight for equality as a reflection of Congregationalist Churches influence, which was one of its four predecessor denominations (the other three being The Reform Church, the Evangelical Church and The Christian Church). The Congregationalist had engaged in the fight against slavery but as Dr. Wright makes clear, while the "Congregationalist churches were active in the Anti-Slavery Movement, the Abolitionist Movement and concerned about the plight of Africans in the United States, not all of the white members of the congregational church were believers in equality for Africans."<sup>22</sup>

This is very important to understand how TUCC became a church that worshiped white while looking Black. The Congregationalist started over 500 schools for newly freed Africans after emancipation (as did other denominations). In those schools Africans were taught that the only acceptable form of worship was the way whites did in New England. The mindset of doing mission also had an affect on Blacks who went to any of the historically Black schools started by missionaries from any of the denominations. As

---

<sup>21</sup>Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr., *A Sankofa Moment: The History of Trinity United Church of Christ* (Dallas, TX: Saint Paul Press, 2010), 48.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 22.

Dr. Wright explains, "The mission focus [of TUCC], incidentally was a missionary focus which meant doing something in mission *for those people*."<sup>23</sup>

For the first ten years of their existence, the members of TUCC did not see themselves as part of the community but a church that was above those in the community. There was and still is a housing project; Governor Lowden Homes, that sits just east of TUCC and has been there since the late 1930's. For the first ten years Governor Lowden Homes was largely ignored as a ministry focus of TUCC.

The change of TUCC came after the assassination of Dr. King, along with the wave of African consciousness that swept through the country among African-Americans. During the period between 1967 and 1971 is when the Black power movement among college students and members of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), began. Dr. James Cone had launched black liberation theology; Black gospel music was being demanded on college campuses along with Black studies programs being instituted. James Brown's "Say It Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud" was being played on radio stations all over the country. It was during this turbulent time in America that John Carlos and Tommie Smith raised their fist with Black gloves on them as a salute to Black Power at the 1968 Olympics and a spirit of African pride was blossoming in the hearts of many Black people in this country.

It was during this period that TUCC had a change in pastoral leadership when its second pastor, Reverend Willie Jamerson left TUCC and the congregation to quote Dr. Wright, because of an "identity crisis." Dr. Wright explains, "Many members who felt that Trinity was too European in its worship and its notions of class began to leave the

---

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 46.

church...dwindling its numbers from 400 down to eighty-seven members.”<sup>24</sup> Dr. Wright further explains that the congregation then asked itself a difficult question, “Are we going to be a Black church in the Black community? Or, are we going to continue being a white church in Black face; because that is all we are!”<sup>25</sup> The difficult question did not limit itself to worship, but also extended to how TUCC would do ministry? Dr. Wright explains that the shift in ministry mindset went from doing “Ministry *to* the people in the projects and the people who did not make as much money as they did...to doing ministry *with* all God’s people across cultural, educational and socioeconomic lines.”<sup>26</sup>

It was also during this period explains Dr. Wright, that the interim pastor of TUCC encapsulated the move among Black people in America between 1967 and 1971 when coined the term “Unashamedly Black and Unapologetically Christian.”<sup>27</sup>

In being interviewed for the pastorate of TUCC by Mr. Vallmer Jordan, Dr. Wright explains that the leadership of TUCC wanted to go in a different direction from the way they had been going. They now wanted,

To change the perception that the community had of them; they wanted to be known as a welcoming congregation. They wanted a worship service that was exciting and attracting to African Americans, unashamed of their history, unashamed of their legacy, unashamed of their culture and highly-skilled in every profession imaginable! They wanted to be faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ. They wanted a ministry that followed in the footsteps of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s ministry. They wanted a church that confronted head-on the problems of the city of Chicago and the problems of Africans both on the Continent and in the Diaspora.

On March 1, 1972 Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr. was called to be the third pastor of Trinity United Church of Christ. Dr. Wright and the congregation changed the worship

---

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 46.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 48.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.



style to reflect the exuberance of an African form of worship. In this, “Marriage made in heaven,” where the congregation and pastor are putting flesh on the bones of what it means to be Black and Christian,” TUCC was one of the few congregations (Out of thousands in Chicago) in 1975 to visibly stand with Black South Africans by displaying a “Free South Africa” sign on its front lawn.

TUCC with the help of its members from the other two Americas and the Caribbean formed the Caribbean connection ministry to educate “members of the church who were born and raised in the United States about the people, history, legacy, culture, music, and the traditions of Africans who were raised in a different part of the West African Diaspora.”<sup>28</sup> “The Africa Ministry” of TUCC was developed with the same focus in mind.

Dr. Wright and the Congregation began celebrating the “Umoja Karamu” service instead of the traditional Thanksgiving Day service that most other churches celebrate on Thanksgiving Day. Dr. Ed Simms as a celebration of the Black Family developed the Umoja Karamu service.

In 1981 the congregation of TUCC adopted a twelve point Black Value System. The twelve points to the Black Value system of TUCC were,

1. Commitment to God
2. Commitment to the Black Community
3. Commitment to the Black Family
4. Dedication to the Pursuit of Education
5. Dedication to the Pursuit of Excellence

---

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 151.

6. Adherence to the Black Work Ethic
7. Commitment to Self-Discipline and Self-Respect
8. Disavowal of the Pursuit of Middleclassness,
9. Pledge to Make the Fruits of all Developing and Acquired Skills Available to the Black Community,
10. Pledge to Allocate Regularly. A Portion of Personal Resources for Strengthening and Supporting Black Institutions,
11. Pledge Allegiance to All Black Leadership Who Espouse and Embrace the Black Value System
12. Personal Commitment to Embracement of the Black Value System. To measure the worth and validity of all activity in terms of positive contributions to the general welfare of the Black Community and the Advancement of Black People towards freedom.”<sup>29</sup>

Critical to the model that Dr. Wright and the Congregation of TUCC developed through Black worship, education and visioning was activism, agitation and activism. As early as 1973, Dr. Wright and the Congregation started a *Church In Society* ministry “Charged with the responsibility of keeping the members aware of all of the social issues that our denomination addressed and that we as Black Christians needed to address. That ministry held political forums, asked us to sign petitions and caused us to become actively involved in seeking justice in our city, our state, our nation and our world.”<sup>30</sup>

Another part of the activism of Dr. Wright and the congregation of TUCC are seen in the Drug & Alcohol Recovery ministry, the “Prison Ministry that didn’t just have worship...but worked with the incarcerated to teach GED classes. [The] Prison ministry

---

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 149-150.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 76.

lobbied for legislative reform in order that marketable skills may once again be taught to persons who are incarcerated.”<sup>31</sup>

There is an HIV/AIDS ministry whose members are taught “the sensitivities necessary for ministering effectively with persons who have an incurable disease...[and] work with the families of one who is dying and/or one who has a disease for which there is no cure”<sup>32</sup>

Dr. Wright and the congregation of TUCC has been one of the leading congregations in womanist liberation theology by supporting and involving women in all facets of the ministry of Jesus Christ. Dr. Wright and the TUCC congregation has been out front in the fight for equal rights for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer (LGBTQ) community and supporting the involvement of gays and lesbians in the ministry of Jesus Christ in all its facets.

The Church under Dr. Wright’s leadership has built two Senior Citizen Housing Facilities, a Child Care program, a Federally Chartered Credit Union, and a Higher Education Corporation. The Church under Dr. Wright’s leadership has a Legal Counseling ministry, Hospice Ministry, a Mental Health ministry, a Domestic Violence ministry, and both Boys and Girls Mentoring/Rites of Passage ministries.

Dr. Wright and TUCC developed over seventy ministries as it grew from sixty-seven members when Dr. Wright was called as pastor to over 8,000 active members and at least 10,000 on the church roll. The writer believes based on the work that Dr. Jeremiah A. Wright, Jr., and the membership of TUCC have accomplished in thirty-six years is perhaps the best model of a ministry that weds the spiritual, social and cultural in

---

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 158-159.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 161.

the ministry of Jesus Christ. The example of Dr. Wright and TUCC demonstrates the biblical model that the writer identified of how God raises up deliverers who work *with* and *for* the people God is seeking to liberate from oppression.

### **Theological Foundation**

Prophetic ministry consist of offering an alternative perception of reality and in letting people see their own history in the light of God's freedom and his will for justice.<sup>33</sup>

Theologian Walter Rauschenbusch 1861-1918, pastored "among the working people on the West Side of New York...the plain people."<sup>34</sup> Rauschenbusch felt a debt to these plain people who lived under what he calls a pressure that bears them down...<sup>35</sup> The writer is suggesting that because of the social, political and economic weight Rauschenbusch experienced among the working...plain people of New York City's Hell Kitchen, that he became acutely aware of the need for a theological, spiritual and biblical response to the poverty he witnessed among the people. The intertwining of one's biblical and spiritual experience with a social milieu is in the writer's view and for Rauschenbusch's writings at the heart of the ministry of Jesus.

The writer has attempted to connect the dots of the biblical history from the experience of the Hebrews being delivered from Egyptian bondage to the liberators of the Israelites in the biblical records of the Judges through the pronouncements of the

---

<sup>33</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 116-117.

<sup>34</sup>Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianity And The Social Crisis in the 21st Century*, ed. Paul Rauschenbusch (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2007), xxii.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

prophets to the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth and how the social needs of the people and their spiritual life were married together intentionally.

Walter Rauschenbusch is a theologian of the 20th century who wrote extensively to draw these very connections. In his book, *Christianity and the Social Crisis* Rauschenbusch wrote

Whoever uncouples the religious and the social life has not understood Jesus. Whoever sets any bounds for the reconstructive power of the religious life over the social relations and institutions of men, to that extent denies the faith of the Master.<sup>36</sup>

In examining the biblical context from the Old Testament through the New Testament, Rauschenbusch demonstrates that the theology of the sacred text was done from the ground up; theology according to the personalities of scripture came from the experiences of the oppressed, poor and disinherited and not from the top down. The life and ministry of Jesus is cut from the perspective of the oppressed. As the son of a humble Carpenter, “isn’t this the carpenter’s son?” (Mt 13:55). Jesus knew personally the struggle of everyday people to scratch out a living.

Jesus grew up knowing the pains of poverty as Luke makes it clear that when the baby Jesus was presented at the temple, his parents could not afford the more proper offering of a lamb but a pair of doves or two young pigeons (Lk 2:22-24).

Therefore in his book, *Christianity and the Social Crisis*, Rauschenbusch begins his examination with the prophets of the Old Testament. The prophetic tradition of biblical Israel illustrates an unbroken thread of justice concerns that continued on into the ministry of Jesus. The biblical prophets spoke on behalf of God to present the justice concerns of God to those who were in power and who set policy. This is a unique aspect

---

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 42.

of the biblical prophetic tradition that did seem to be solely focused on instances of individual salvation but the life of the entire community/nation of biblical Israel. The Old Testament prophets therefore directed much of their proclamations to the kings, priest and leadership of biblical Israel to say whether God was pleased with their governance of the people or not. If God was not pleased then in the prophetic tradition a *Forth telling* was rendered. Forth telling had to do with the outcome or consequences of the injustices perpetrated by the powerful in biblical Israel upon the community/nation of people in biblical Israel. The prophets were thus primarily concerned with the conditions of the poor in Israel and became vehicles for God to voice God's displeasure to those who had caused the poor conditions.

Rauschenbusch begins his discussion with these salient words, "The fundamental conviction of the prophets, which distinguished them from ordinary religious life of their day, was the conviction that God demands righteousness and demands nothing but righteousness."<sup>37</sup> To note that God demands justice and right treatment of God's people is essential in the discussion. The justice work of the prophets of biblical Israel was not a good thought they had, and/or a nice sentiment that they were expressing, it was a demand by God. The writer mentioned earlier in this discussion from the text of Micah 6:8 that God declares through the mouth of the prophet, "What God require, and that is to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

The prophets according to Raschenbusch in many respects became the champions of the poor, spokespersons for the indigent and the voices for the voiceless. In being the protectors of the oppressed and being a part of the biblical narrative would then suggest standards that all were to follow who came after the prophets to and including this

---

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 3.

present day generation. Religion according to the example of the biblical prophets and in the opinion of Raschenbusch is best seen when it fights against the powerful on behalf of the powerless. “When the prophets conceived Jehovah as the special vindicator of these voiceless classes, it was another way of saying that it is the chief duty in religious morality to stand for the rights of the helpless.”<sup>38</sup>

Rauschenbusch’ assessment of the ministry of Jesus had to be observed in the context of his setting in history. In his classic work, *Jesus and the Disinherited* Howard Thurman makes three important introductory observations about Jesus before he begins his examination of the ministry of Jesus. Howard Thurman first points out, “Jesus was a Jew.”<sup>39</sup> Jesus belonged to an ethnic group that has a long history and legacy. Thurman next says, “Jesus was a poor Jew.”<sup>40</sup> The writer has already made reference to the poverty status that Jesus was born into. The final point that Thurman made in his introductory examination of the ministry of Jesus was, “Jesus was a member of a minority group in the midst of a larger dominant and controlling group.”<sup>41</sup>

The writer makes this connection with Thurman and Rauschenbusch because it illustrates the importance of Rauschenbusch’ examination of the ministry of Jesus in the context of his time and setting in life. Jesus according to Rauschenbusch saw value and worth in every human being despite any malady they suffered or social context they came from. In his work, *The Social Principles of Jesus*, Rauschenbusch says, “Physical

---

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 9.

<sup>39</sup>Howard Thurman, *Jesus And The Disinherited* (Richmond, VA: Friends United Press, 1981), 15.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 17.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 18.

deformity and moral guilt could not obscure the divine worth of human life to him.”<sup>42</sup>

Rauschenbusch determines that the reason Jesus could see divine value and worth in every individual was because of his relationship with the eternal God. Rauschenbusch first establishes that Jesus’ “respect for every concrete person whom he met was due to his religious insight into human life and destiny.”<sup>43</sup> Moreover the deeper secret to the respect of humanity for Jesus Rauschenbusch determines, “The God of Jesus was the great Father who lets his light shine on the just and the unjust, and offers forgiveness and love to all. Jesus lived in the spiritual atmosphere of that faith. Consequently he saw men from that point of view. They were to him children of that God.”<sup>44</sup>

The humble and simple background of Jesus coupled with his insight into the nature and character of God were essential in the writer’s view as to how the ministry of Jesus was drawn to the least of his society in order to lift their estimation of themselves. The lens out of which Jesus viewed other people was shaped by his own day-to-day interactions with people of his race, his economic class and his experience as a member of an oppressed group. It was also Jesus’s insight into the heart of God that allowed him to spread a message of love to those who needed lifting the most. Rauschenbusch explains the ministry of Jesus beginning with the poor by saying, “Plainly Jesus saw his mission in raising to free and full life those whom life had held down and hurt.”<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup>Walter Rauschenbusch, *The Social Principles of Jesus* (New York, NY: The Woman’s Press, 1917), 13.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 41.



Moreover Rauschenbusch draws the connection with Jesus and the poor from Jesus' own words, "In these Beatitudes, as Luke reports them, Jesus clearly takes sides with the lowly. He says God and the future are not on the side of the rich, the satiated: the devotees of pleasure, the people who take the popular side on everything."<sup>46</sup>

There is another area of the life and ministry of Jesus that Rauschenbusch sought to demolish and disabuse his readers of. It was the common view of Jesus as passive. To Rauschenbusch Jesus was a man of vitality and passion. For instance in the naming of three of his disciples Jesus did not use passive names designed to cool whatever fire blazed within them. In giving them these names Rauschenbusch states, "All were [nicknames] to express forcefulness; Simon he called Peter, the rock; and James and John he called Boanerges, the sons of thunder."<sup>47</sup> The nicknames were given according to Rauschenbusch because the disciples were being sent "open eyed to face trouble; [Because] wolves were waiting for them..."<sup>48</sup>

Moreover Rauschenbusch emphasizes a new look at the disposition of Jesus, "Let us clear our minds forever of the idea that Jesus was a mild and innocuous person who parted his hair and beard in the middle, and turned his disciples into mollicoddles. Away with it!"<sup>49</sup>

Rauschenbusch presents a theological and theoretical foundation for understanding that Christianity has a long history of being socially active in the affairs of those who are at the bottom of society economically, politically and socially. His

---

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 44.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 88.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid.

arguments challenge American conservative Christianity's laser focus on heavenly salvation that ignores the earthly needs of people who exist in slums, ghettos and who struggle everyday just to make a living. Rauschenbusch's historical background of Jesus of Nazareth and his *sitz im leben* in life gives followers of Jesus a lens to see what important factors shaped Jesus' ministry to the people of his ethnic group and why his approach was meant for the average Jew of his day. The discussion that Rauschenbusch has developed concerning the importance of expanding the understanding of the social aim of the religion of Jesus suggest to the writer that where there is an absence of a social focus in Christianity or a particular congregation, there is also a void in the spiritual relationship to Jesus of Nazareth.

Rauschenbusch' theoretical analysis to the writer is also complemented by the praxis of those lay theologians who created that genre of music known as the "Negro Spirituals." The Africans who were enslaved in North America under the system known, as chattel slavery did not just produce a form of beautiful music but they produced a religious response to the wretchedness of life in bondage. They also gave birth to a theology of hope and liberation in song while suffering the dehumanizing crucible known as chattel slavery.

Chattel slavery was the form of slavery practiced in North America that was perhaps the worst demonstration of human bondage ever devised by one group of people to oppress another. L. H. Welchel states in his book *History and Heritage of African-American Churches*,

Slavery is inhuman wherever and whenever it is practiced, but the chattel slavery developed by North American colonists was unrivaled in the utter intensity of its brutality. Slaves in North America were property, period. They had no recognized rights as human beings, and consideration was given only to what they could

produce economically. This form of slavery was extreme when compared to slavery practiced in other countries, such as South America.<sup>50</sup>

Whelchel makes another important clarification concerning Africans forcibly brought into North America when he states,

African Americans did not suddenly appear *ex nihilo* in the seventeenth century, and they did not emerge as mere spiritual and cultural destitutes. Many of the Africans who were captured and brought involuntarily to America were skilled craftsmen, agriculturalist, griots, priest and priestesses, and some were members of royalty.<sup>51</sup>

The notion that Africans received Christianity from their White enslavers is another inaccuracy that historian of Black sacred music John Lovell addresses by stating “If the American white man fancies that he was the first to teach the Bible to his Black slave, he is quite mistaken. A number of the African travelers have testified to African acquaintance with the Christian Bible.”<sup>52</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup>L. H. Whelchel, *History and Heritage of African-American Churches: A Way Out of No Way* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2011), Kindle Electronic Edition: Chapter 3, Location 1392-7042.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 89-7042.

<sup>52</sup>John Lovell, Jr., *Black Song: The Forge And The Flame, The Story of How the Afro-American Spiritual was Hammered Out* (London, UK: MacMillan Company, 1972), 31.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### METHODOLOGY

The context for the writer's research project is Trinity United Church of Christ-Gary (TUCCG), in Gary, Indiana. The project statement is: *Prophetic Preaching that raises interest and awareness in the historical relevance of African ancestry for the formation of social activism in the congregation of TUCCG*. What does it do?

No one comes through this life without a background, a history, a legacy and a culture. African people living in The United States of America are no different. The challenge for people of African ancestry in America is living, loving, celebrating and carrying on the values of that legacy.

The reasons that people of African ancestry in America have not been able to fully embrace their history and culture are many. One essential aspect of the history and culture of people of African ancestry is the movement for social justice for themselves and for all people who suffer oppression. Another challenge to embracing this aspect of African history is a prophetic reading, interpretation, and understanding of the sacred text. It is the writer's contention that within the sacred text, there is a continuous thread that runs from Genesis to Revelation and that thread is liberation.

Moreover the writer believes that because the sacred text originated, and was lived out predominantly in Africa that African people were not objects but leading subjects in the sacred narrative.

The writer believes that Gary, Indiana and in particular TUCCG is an ideal place for the interest and awareness of the African Relevance of the social justice movement to take root. Over the last nine years, the writer has cultivated a context for the appreciation, awareness and interest in both the African identity of the membership of TUCCG and interest in a theological lens of social justice. The writer has done this first of all through prophetic preaching. The writer also understands that prophetic preaching alone will not convince people in the congregation to celebrate their historical relevance in the social justice movement.

The writer has also employed teaching from an African centered perspective that highlights the fight for liberation in scripture and in the daily life. The writer's relational approach, activism in various areas of the fight for social justice and making sure that the branding of TUCCG from a person first entering the doors of the church and seeing the flags of the different African countries to the motto of TUCCG, *We are not just another church but we are a culturally conscious Christ-centered church committed to the community* all help to create the context to develop this kind of ministry.

The hypothesis of the project suggest that if the people of TUCCG are exposed to their historical relevance in the social justice movement both in the biblical narrative and the historical records that it will fan the flame of interest in, and awareness of their importance as a people in the fight for equality and be the catalyst for the membership to develop ministries that are engaged in the struggle for justice.

The writer believes this model can be a reference for congregations that seek to help eradicate systemic injustice and bring a change for the better in the lives of those who are poor, disenfranchised and oppressed in America and the world. The writer believes that when any individual or group make a conscious decision to address systemic oppression that it becomes the impetus for other people of faith and goodwill to find ways to engage themselves thus continuing a movement. The congregation of TUCCG can be in that way an incentive to other people of faith to address the societal inequities and to help change the conditions of those most affected by these inequities for the better.

The writer's spiritual autobiography demonstrates that this lens through which the writer observes the faith tradition of Jesus of Nazareth has been that constant thread running through the writer's life.

This chapter will address how the project was implemented and tested. The project consisted of an introductory meeting, a pre-survey of questions, a sermon series and a post survey questionnaire all developed to raise interest and awareness in the historical relevance of African people in the movement of social justice.

### **Introductory Meeting**

The introductory meeting with the writer's context associates allowed the writer to share the title of the project and give an overview of the model. During the introductory meeting the writer shared his definition of prophetic preaching and how his definition informed the project. The overview of the project model consisted of the sermons series that would be preached, and the pre and post survey questions that would be given to the congregation and associates.

The context associates were allowed to ask clarifying questions concerning method of the project and whether qualitative or quantitative analysis would yield the best results. During the meeting the context associates also shared their input concerning the questions both pre and post while also getting clarity concerning the material of the sermon series. This gave the context associates the opportunity in advance to become fully immersed in the project along with the writer.

### **The Pre-Survey Questions**

The context associates started two weeks before the sermon series would be preached informing the members of the congregation concerning the project. During that time they were able to answer questions that members of the congregation had and give clarity where it was needed. The context associates also explained the process for members to obtain a CD of the service if they missed a service in order to be able to adequately answer the post survey questions.

The Pre-survey questions were designed to engage the feelings of the members concerning social justice activism from the vantage point of being a Christian. The questions were also designed to elicit the visceral feelings of the members and how they felt about their own cultural identity in this country, world and the biblical narrative. The pre-survey questions were as follows:

- Do you know what social justice means?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes

- Do you feel that social justice is just acting with compassion?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes
- Do you have an awareness of persons or groups involved in social justice action?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes
- Is social justice a concern of yours?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes
- Are you interested in or inspired by social justice action?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes
- Do you feel Christians should not be involved in politics because there is a separation of church and state in this country?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes
- Do you believe we have a special privilege and responsibility to use the power of our citizenship to promote justice?



- No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes
- Do you feel social justice is one of the fundamental issues in the Bible?
    - No
    - Somewhat
    - Yes
- Do you believe that caring for the poor, sick and oppressed is one of God's expectations for God's people according to the Old Testament?
    - No
    - Somewhat
    - Yes
- Do you feel that according to the Bible, Christians should not break laws in the interest of seeking justice?
    - No
    - Somewhat
    - Yes
- Are there biblical characters that could be associated with social justice?
    - No
    - Somewhat
    - Yes

- Do you consider yourself an African?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes
- Do you consider yourself an African-American?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes
- Do you consider yourself to be Black?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes
- Do you consider yourself to be an African living in America?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes
- Do you know the historical role of Africans in the Bible?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes

- Do you have a clear understanding of African and Western culture?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes
- Are the Bible, spirituality and social justice linked?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes
- Do you rank one's spirituality over social justice action?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes
- Do you have an interest to be a part of the social justice ministry at TUCC-Gary?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes

### **Sermon Series**

The sermon series was designed to engage the listeners on relevant issues of inequality that plagued the Black, brown and poor communities of all races in the United States of America and in the world. Each sermon was preached from a prophetic hermeneutic in order to accurately address the situation of each text in its context but then demonstrate what the text suggests about the systemic issues of social, political and

economic injustice in this present age. The sermon titles themselves were designed to both arrest the listener's attention and inform the listener about prophetic social activism in a variety of areas. The sermons for the sermon series are:

- Straighten up and fly right
- It takes a nation of millions to hold us back
- Two Thousand seasons
- Fight the power
- Stand

The exegetical research done in each sermon from each biblical text gave relevance and valuable insights to the sermon series. The exegesis allowed the listeners to understand their role in helping to change conditions of injustice and realize the presence of God actively aiding them in the work of social justice activism from a biblical foundation. The title of each sermon was chosen for pedagogical purposes. Three of the titles are titles of popular songs from the Rhythm and Blues genre, "Stand," by Sly and The Family Stone; the Hip Hop genre, "Fight The Power," by Public Enemy; and one from the Jazz genre, "Straighten up and Fly Right," by Nat King Cole. One of the titles from the Hip Hop genre "It takes a nation of Millions to hold us back," is the title of Public Enemy's second album. The title "Two Thousand Seasons," is the title of a book by Nigerian author Ayi Kwei Armah.

The sermon titles served to attract the attention of the listeners because of the familiarity and to connect listeners across generational lines in order to see the common struggle for Social justice action. The titles also were intended to demonstrate how music

is another arm in the liberation struggle in the same way as the genre of “The Negro Spirituals” did for the liberation of enslaved Africans on southern plantations.

The sermons were preached on Sunday morning during worship service at TUCCG. After the series of sermons was preached, the congregation was given a post-survey questionnaire. The writer along with the context associates chose to use a narrative format in answering the set of questions. The reason was an attempt to get the most honest feelings from individuals in the congregation in their own words, to ascertain how much, if any, each member had learned and been influenced by and challenged by with the sermon materials while trying to minimize any member trying to impress the writer by answering the way they might think the writer would want them to.

The post-survey questions are:

- Define social justice.
- Does social justice simply mean acting with compassion? Explain.
- Name some Biblical persons or groups involved in social action.
- Are you interested in and/or inspired by social justice action? Why or why not?
- Being a Christian means that you:
  - Should not be involved in politics
  - Should use the power of your citizenship to promote justice.
  - Explain why you feel this way.
- Social justice is one of the fundamental issues in the Bible. Explain your rationale for supporting or rejecting this statement.
- Caring for the poor, sick and oppressed is one of God’s expectations for God’s people. Where is evidence of this found in the Bible?
- Name some Biblical characters that are associated with social justice.

- Do you consider yourself to be an African, African-American, Black or African living in America? Why?
- What is the historical role of Africans in the Bible?
- How are the Bible, spirituality and social justice linked?
- Which do you rate most important: your spirituality or social justice action? Why?
- Why did God create social justice?
- Fill in the blank: God sides with the \_\_\_\_\_ in history.
- Fill in the blank: God partnered with \_\_\_\_\_ people to implement God's social justice theology.
- The mission that Jesus announced in his inaugural sermon should be the mission for the church of Jesus. What is that mission?
- Do you think there is a difference between how social justice is valued amongst Christians from different racial or ethnic groups? Explain your response.
- What issues would you like to see the social justice ministry of Trinity United Church of Christ in Gary to be involved with?

Both questionnaires were administered and collected by the context associates along with help from the usher's ministry. The writer along with the context associates then tabulated, analyzed, and scored the data for results.

The process took approximately ten weeks to complete. The first two weeks consisted of getting the congregation ready by having discussion, question and answer and preparing copies of the questions. Next the pre-survey questions were given to the congregation and collected by the context associates with help from the usher's ministry. The next section took five weeks for the writer to preach the series of sermons. The congregation had been advised to take sermon notes and was informed that they could ask questions concerning any of the sermons in between the presentation or after any sermon were preached. This period also allowed the context associates to get names of

anyone who might have missed any of the sermons and make sure they got copies of the sermon(s) missed.

The next section was the administering of the post-survey questions the following week after the last sermon was preached. The writer and the context associates spent approximately two weeks tabulating and analyzing the data from the surveys. The model would be tested based on the pre and post surveys. The pre-survey format was multiple choice, while the second survey was narrative which allowed the writer and the context associates to get a clearer picture of the awareness and interest level of the participants.

The process did not always go as smooth as the writer or the context associates would have liked. The writer gave the option for the participants to put their names on the surveys if they wanted, however most people thought it was required and put their name on their survey anyway. This told the writer that there was either mis-communication from the context associates or within the ranks of the congregation or both. What the writer discovered is that some people who put their names on the surveys were less likely to be totally honest in sharing what they did not know concerning the Bible or their history as an African people or both. The writer should have made it clear that no names were required on the surveys in order for participants to feel a sense of anonymity in answering the questions, which may have allowed more honest response.

The writer's intent at the end of the process was to be able to discern a rise in questions concerning more teaching, preaching on African biblical studies and ultimately more participation in social action through ministry formation designed to address the diverse challenges facing the Black community of Gary and poor people in general.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **FIELD EXPERIENCE**

Social Justice and African people both on the continent of Africa and in diaspora have been a marriage and a beacon of hope from the very first time any human thought to marginalize, subjugate or oppress another human. What is becoming more and more unique is the understanding and appreciation of this knowledge by African people particularly in the United States of America and among Americans in general of all races.

When people of African descent do not know how central they have been to the liberation of all people, but in particular, African people in this world, a vacuum is created in the souls of people of African descent, and a void is formed in the body politic of human affairs worldwide. That vacuum will be filled by such things as apathy, hopelessness, low self-esteem, acculturation, assimilation and ethnic amnesia. The void created is the absence of a fascinating piece of human fabric in the mosaic of life.

The outcome being that when presented with opportunities to fight to change unjust policies that oppress them, confront systems of subjugation and counter the underdeveloping of their own communities, people who do not know their history or who fail to appreciate their importance in history, will either accept their devalued status as the way things are or try to escape by amalgamating among other people, other ethnic groups and other races of people.



The writer has sought in this project to stimulate the interest and awareness of the parishioners of Trinity United Church of Christ-Gary in their historical importance to social justice work to uplift their own communities and in so doing provide inspiration to oppressed people in this world to overcome oppression.

The writer recognized that it takes a team effort to plan, implement and analyze data and therefore used great care in recruiting both professional and context associates.

### **Professional Associate**

The writer chose as his professional associate a pastor who has served the church for over thirty-six years and whose ministry model has been and continues to be an example to the writer of what a socially conscious African-centered ministry can look like. The writer has and continues to use the relationship with his professional associate to critique the scholarship of the writer's work, consult on the methodology of the writer's project, and give assessment of the project to see if it measures up to the academic integrity of the United Theological Seminary.

### **Context Associate**

There were a total of four context associates which composed of two men and two women. The context associates roles were to promote the purpose and importance of the project to the congregation. The context associates developed and implemented the survey questions based on each of the sermon installments and these individuals are the ones who made the copies of the surveys, distributed the surveys to the members of the congregation, collected the surveys and made sure that members who did not attend any

particular service received a compact disc of the sermon they missed in order to accurately fill out the survey. The context associates finally were the ones to do the data retrieval, tabulate the responses on the surveys and analyze that that data.

### **The Process**

The purpose of the project is to inspire an appreciation and awareness of historical relevance of African people in the moment of social justice action. The writer hoped that highlighting the important roles played by African people both biblically and historically would raise appreciation and value of the cultural memory of the members of Trinity UCC-Gary. The writer then expected that with the renewed appreciation of their cultural memory members would begin to feel a sense of duty to God and humanity to be faithful in the advocacy for all oppressed people.

Gary Indiana has a rich legacy of African American people making great strides in the progress of liberation for not only Black people but poor people in general. The congregation of TUCCG is laced with this legacy in the lives of its members. The writer also understands that TUCCG is a new church, and from the very beginning of the church's foundation, it was clear, via the branding of the church as *Unashamedly Black and Unapologetically Christian*, that it would be an African-centered, social justice focused, and biblically based congregation.

Therefore the overwhelming majority of its members come to TUCCG because this brand is intriguing to them. However there is also a history of repression in Gary Indiana from the state government and business community at large against those who have exercised their self-determination as African people living in America that has created a context of containment. This context of containment is a kind of hesitancy,

ambivalence and suppression in many people in Gary and Northwest Indiana out of fear that there will be a negative reaction from those in positions of power that will further disenfranchise the community of badly needed resources.

The writer felt that by retelling the historical, biblical, and personal stories of African people who faced similar situations of struggle, that a renewed interest will stir in the members which can lead to the desire to not only appreciate their cultural memory through greater awareness but ultimately lead to committed and consistent social action that forms the foundation of all the ministries of TUCCG.

In order to substantiate the writer's hypothesis, the writer used a methodology designed to illicit responses from the members of TUCCG that would give insights as to their understanding of their own history as people of African ancestry and their feelings concerning being a social justice focused congregation. The writer would assess where the members of the congregation were concerning their African ancestry and social justice and then would analyze if any interest was stimulated at the end of the project.

The writer used the measurements of interest and awareness as tools. Before there can be committed and concerned action in the areas defined by the project, there should be some interest in the project and a desire in the congregation to be more aware of the implications of being African-centered in one's approach to social justice from the vantage point of a Christian congregation.

The model is contextually tied to the African American church and community; however, it can also lend itself to other ethnic, racial, ideological, and theological contexts that would like to become more active in creating community models that advocate for a more just society. Other groups who would like to replicate the model

would first have to be clear on what a social justice minded congregation actually is and does. Other congregations that are not African American would not find pride in being African because they would not actually be people of African ancestry. Yet they could choose to teach and preach the biblical, historical, geographical, linguistic and cultural truths concerning the people in the Judeo, Christian and Islamic heritage of the Bible. Those churches would not be African, but could take up the fight to liberate all people who struggle under oppressive policies, and those churches could learn to celebrate the legacy of Africans on the continent and in diaspora.

The model used a three phase approach. Phase one was the introduction and explanation of the project, phase two was a sermon series, phase three was the post survey.

The phase approach was designed to assess, understand and analyze the feelings, experiences and understanding of the membership of TUCCG concerning their African influence in Social Justice both biblically and historically. Below the writer gives an overview of each phase that was designed to analyze the data received from the responses of the congregation.

### **Introduction and Explanation of the Project to the Congregation**

In phase one, the initial introduction and explanation of the project to the congregation was done during a worship service for two consecutive Sundays before the first survey or phase two was submitted. Time was taken during service to allow for introduction, explanation and questions and answers from the congregation. The context associates performed this portion of the project and in discussing the project were careful not to share what questions would be asked or what the first survey was attempting to

ascertain. This was done in order to gain the most honest and genuine expressions from members of the congregation as to what they already knew about their own cultural, historical and biblical heritage in the movement for social justice from the survey in phase two. It was also explained that any member that missed a worship service would be able to get a CD of the sermon free of cost in order to keep up with the process.

### **Sermon Series**

The writer used a five part series of sermons that was designed to exegete a series of texts in the Bible explaining the context in which each text is set. The context included a description of the writer of each text, the people to whom the text was written, the time in history of the text, the issue or situation addressed in each text and the resolution of that situation in the text. The writer then juxtaposed the context of the biblical text along with the issue or situation to be resolved in the text with a person(s), and/or contemporary movement to illustrate the areas of cultural connection, the universal nature of unmerited suffering and the visceral drive to do something to end that suffering for all oppressed in history. The sermon titles were:

- Straighten Up And Fly Right
- It Takes A Nation of Millions to hold us Back
- Two Thousand Seasons
- Fight The Power
- Stand

Before the sermon series was preached the pre-survey was distributed to ascertain how each person felt concerning their knowledge of African and African American

people both biblically and historically in the movements for social justice. The respondents were given instructions that if they wanted to put their names on the pre-survey they could but it would not be necessary. The set of twenty questions was multiple choices designed to get their gut reactions concerning importance, need and knowledge of what social justice is and if it is biblically based. The questions also were designed to elicit their feelings on how they categorized their own racial identity and if that was important to their faith journey.

The pre-survey questions were as follows:

- Do you know what social justice means?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes
- Do you feel that social justice is just acting with compassion?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes
- Do you have an awareness of persons or groups involved in social justice action?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes

- Is social justice a concern of yours?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes
- Are you interested in or inspired by social justice action?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes
- Do you feel Christians should not be involved in politics because there is a separation of church and state in this country?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes
- Do you believe we have a special privilege and responsibility to use the power of our citizenship to promote justice?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes
- Do you feel social justice is one of the fundamental issues in the Bible?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes

- Do you believe that caring for the poor, sick and oppressed is one of God's expectations for God's people according to the Old Testament?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes
- Do you feel that according to the Bible, Christians should not break laws in the interest of seeking justice?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes
- Are their biblical characters that could be associated with social justice?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes
- Do you consider yourself an African?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes
- Do you consider yourself an African-American?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes



- Do you consider yourself to be Black?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes
- Do you consider yourself to be an African living in America?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes
- Do you know the historical role of Africans in the Bible?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes
- Do you have a clear understanding of African and Western culture?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes
- Are the Bible, spirituality and social justice linked?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes

- Do you rank one's spirituality over social justice action?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes
- Do you have an interest to be a part of the social justice ministry at TUCC-Gary?
  - No
  - Somewhat
  - Yes

After the sermon series was preached the post-survey questions were given to the congregants. The post survey questions required a narrative answer instead of a multiple choice. This was done for two reasons. First, the format of the way the questions were to be answered was changed to narrative because the writer discerned that many in the congregation were answering the multiple choice questions in a way that they believed would please the writer as their pastor. The writer discovered that many people in the congregation are not comfortable with submitting to a *yes, no* document that they do not know something or do not care for an issue that they think their pastor cares about deeply. The second reason was to allow the congregants the opportunity to express their thoughts more freely after hearing the sermon series.

The questions were designed to draw from the information given in the five sermons that had been preached and get the personal reactions from each of the members of the congregation who heard all five sermons.

The questions for the post-survey were as follows:

- Define social justice.
- Does social justice simply mean acting with compassion? Explain.
- Name some Biblical persons or groups involved in social action.
- Are you interested in and/or inspired by social justice action? Why or why not?
- Being a Christian means that you:
  - Should not be involved in politics
  - Should use the power of your citizenship to promote justice.
  - Explain why you feel this way.
- Social justice is one of the fundamental issues in the Bible. Explain your rationale for supporting or rejecting this statement.
- Caring for the poor, sick and oppressed is one of God's expectations for God's people. Where is evidence of this found in the Bible?
- Name some Biblical characters that are associated with social justice.
- Do you consider yourself to be an African, African-American, Black or African living in America? Why?
- What is the historical role of Africans in the Bible?
- How are the Bible, spirituality and social justice linked?
- Which do you rate most important: your spirituality or social justice action? Why?
- Why did God create social justice?
- Fill in the blank: God sides with the \_\_\_\_\_ in history.
- Fill in the blank: God partnered with \_\_\_\_\_ people to implement God's social justice theology.
- The mission that Jesus announced in his inaugural sermon should be the mission for the church of Jesus. What is that mission?
- Do you think there is a difference between how social justice is valued amongst Christians from different racial or ethnic groups? Explain your response.

- What issues would you like to see the social justice ministry of Trinity United Church of Christ in Gary to be involved with?

The data gathered from both the pre and post surveys were of mixed variety.

There were numerous questions on the post survey that members left blank. There were other questions on the post survey that members either did not know how to answer or chose to answer the way they felt best. Those that did answer the questions and who addressed in their answer what the question asked those answers demonstrated an overwhelming interest in the history and culture of African people, both on the continent and in the Diasporas along with the work of social justice that many of these Africans had been involved in. For those who answered all of the questions according to what the question addressed the awareness of and interest in the biblical antecedents of Africans in the Bible and how social justice action was a part of the biblical narrative also was well received.

From the mixed responses of the members in the data it demonstrated that the participants respected the writer's preaching, teaching and presentation. During the sermon series the writer referenced numerous authors and texts to support the thesis of each sermon and this equipped the members to begin their own research.

During the process of this project the writer noticed an interesting phenomenon. Despite the mixed responses from the members there were several social action activities that members enthusiastically engaged in. The writer has been working with a group of ministers in the Northwest Indiana region advocating for jobs, a living wage, adequate healthcare, support of unions and educating citizens about the failed war on drugs. The writer passed out petitions to the congregation to be signed and sent to elected officials

demanding jobs, supporting the family of Trayvonn Martin a teenager who was killed, and to support Marissa Alexander a woman who defended herself from an abusive husband but who ended up incarcerated unjustly.

The writer also invited members of the congregation to a protest at the homes of persons who have the authority to create jobs but who have been resistant to do so. The writer was pleasantly surprised when a number of members chose to stand in freezing cold weather on a Sunday evening protesting for jobs.

There are also weekly occasions when members will either share with the writer or suggest an event to highlight personalities and memorable events in African and African American history. These instances tell the writer that the project is touching a tender and sacred place in the hearts and lives of the membership even if they cannot express it in writing at this time.

Through this process, the writer has attempted to establish a greater respect from members of the congregation to live a faith that addresses the inequities in the lives of God's people because of policies that create and support their oppression.

The data while mixed demonstrated that people want to do something about suffering caused in particular by systemic injustice and that the members want to know more about their history but have not been exposed to or aware of information on their history and the link between the sacred and secular.

The majority of members have only been exposed to before joining TUCCG the one sided negative characterizations in the national media, school text books, traditional Bible materials and heaven focused preaching. The writer gets told almost on a weekly

basis from persons in the congregation that they have never heard teaching and preaching that lifts up Africa and emphasizes social justice.

The writer believes that he has helped to encourage many members of TUCCG to want to know more about themselves as subjects of history and not objects of history through a genuine caring relationship with them, through the writer's sincerity to the mission of cultural memory and through, a social justice lens that challenges people of faith to take action on behalf of the oppressed and poor.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **REFLECTIONS, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

#### **Reflections**

The writer began this doctor of ministry program with the presupposition that people generally will do better if they know better. The writer believes this adage applies to people of African ancestry in the United States of America. For a number of reasons Black people in America either do not know their history or their story. Black people are subjects of history and not objects of history, however, they feel or are made to feel ambivalent about celebrating and learning the lessons of their history on the world stage.

For the African American community in the U.S. to be roughly 13% of the population but lead the nation in so many negative areas from the incarceration rate, to many of the preventable disease rates, to the drop out rates of high school students, suggest that something is wrong with how African Americans see themselves. For African Americans in the U.S. to still have a negative view of Africa and Africans on the continent and not be knowledgeable about Africans through the Diaspora also suggests that there is something skewed in the minds of many Africans Americans living in the United States. The negative depictions of Black people in the media are contributors to not only people of other races having a negative view of Black people but Black people themselves. The lack of prominent Black people in diverse professions despite having Blacks who have achieved in almost every professional discipline is another contributing

factor to the feeling of low achievement in the Black community and low expectations by other races in America. The false depicting of biblical images as Caucasian along with the emphasis of ancient Greek culture in biblical interpretation has also created a context where Africa and Africans are pushed to the margins of biblical history when they should be central to the biblical narrative itself.

The writer is suggesting that for the above reasons and many more, people of African descent in the United States have lost or are losing the will to fight for their basic human rights against systems of institutional hegemony that also profit from systemically created pathologies of Black people. The Culture of any people has historically been the life blood of any race or ethnic groups' survival.

Every race of people that has taken pride in their biological and social link with one another has been able to somehow create a psychological and emotional inoculation against the disease of self- doubt, self-loathing and self-destruction. The writer is suggesting that Africans living in America (and the writer prefers the term Africans living in America), have been at their best in progress as a whole as opposed to individuals who have made in-roads of success when people of African ancestry displayed pride in their African culture and used it as their inspiration to overcome institutional oppression.

The writer can remember from childhood being taught about his maternal great-grandfather and about his great-grandmother whom the writer's grandfather described as pure African, who came through enslavement. The writer has vivid and heartwarming images of his grandfather sharing the genealogical lesson that his grandmother shared with him about their family lineage tracing back to the great Queen Makeba or Sheba of



the biblical text. The writer cannot not forget the lessons learned from his grandfather who was a Pullman car porter, and dining car porter in his career in Chattanooga, Tennessee concerning the importance of the men known as the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the Marcus Garvey movement, the pride Black people felt when Joe Louis beat Max Schmelling and so many others. However these were lessons of history that the writer did not get while navigating through twelve years of public school. These are lessons of history about African people that the writer received from the elders in his family and from his own studies. The writer has discovered that while other racial groups are celebrated when they proudly display their racial legacy, their music, their attire, their language, their communal ways Africans in particular in America are for the most part discouraged from doing the same.

This project is designed to demonstrate that when people of African ancestry in particular but any oppressed group in general are presented with the facts of their liberating, transforming, and restorative roles that their people played in history and when African Americans understand their centrality in the biblical narrative in helping God's sense of justice in human relationships the systems of injustice in this Country and world will begin to cease to exist.

The writer entered into the Doctor of Ministry Program at United Theological Seminary approximately seven years after organizing the New Church Start Trinity United Church of Christ-Gary. When the writer entered the Doctor of ministry program it was also approximately three years after the Membership at TUCCG built their first Church building after spending four years as a congregation in a local public school auditorium. Along with building the ministry of TUCCG, along with family obligations

and participating in social justice activism in the community of Gary and other areas of the country the writer was driven to accomplish this goal.

The community of Gary, Indiana has proven to be an ideal place to build the kind of social justice culture affirming ministry that this project is endeavoring to model. Gary is the first (along with Cleveland, OH) major city in the U.S. to elect the first Black mayor, Richard Gordon Hatcher in 1968. Gary is the only city to ever host a National Black political convention in 1972 that brought together Black politicians, Black artists, musicians, leaders of civil rights organizations and grass-roots activists to put together a Black agenda. There is a latent sense of cultural pride and determined activism that has been dormant in the lives of African Americans in Gary.

The reason this sense of cultural pride and activism has been dormant since the election of the first Black mayor and the Black political convention is as a result of the backlash that the City of Gary received from the business community and the political machinery operating in Indiana. Moreover people who have joined TUCCG have come from other denominational affiliations while some had no church affiliations.

Many if not most who have joined TUCCG came because of the writer's passion concerning our African identity and the writer's determination to do social justice work. The writer has discovered that most of the members found this kind of ministry refreshing despite not understanding how the dots of Biblical interpretation and social activism linked together. Members of TUCCG also came with the baggage of a Biblical view that preached against churches being involved with social activism and against celebrating one's culture as African people.

While the people who have come to TUCCG have hungered for something different and while they have appreciated the writer's passion they have still spent a great deal of their lives in places that preached and taught differently about biblical history and their own cultural identity. These are the challenges that have gone into the writer's pastorate, developing this model and within the writer's cohort group.

In the gospel authored by John the fourteenth chapter and the twelfth verse Jesus is recorded as saying "very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these..."

The writer is of the belief that because Jesus incarnate made life tangibly better for others by feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, giving water to the thirsty and by challenging the oppressive roles of both the Jewish aristocracy and Roman government then those who follow Jesus gave the ability to do the same and greater. This model is designed to help people believe in themselves as made in the image of God and to help them believe they have a driving responsibility to make life better for the least in God's kingdom by challenging oppressive policies and systems.

The writer has been able to form a new network of colleague who also believes that people can and will do better if they know better in this process. God has allowed this writer to be challenge in ways that he would have never imagined had he not gone through this process. In that the writer has developed a deeper sense of urgency in inspiring awareness about a God ordained ability in each person to do the extraordinary in the lives of others from the ordinary places we find ourselves in this life.

## Summary

This project was designed to inspire a sense of awareness in the members of TUCCG in their historical and cultural role in social justice activism. This inspiration and awareness was thought by the writer to impart activism in the members of TUCCG, and this would develop into ministries which would address the injustice prevalent in Gary, this country, and world.

The writer learned in this process that many people are not able or do not feel comfortable writing their feelings in a survey but may be more willing to actually engage in the activity itself.

The writer now believes that he could have used Bible studies and other small intimate group settings to allow members to have question and answer concerning the concepts involved in this project. The writer believes that people might have gained a working knowledge that would have also given them hands on tools to help articulate what was in their hearts. The writer's interaction with members either one on one or in other small groups settings in the church taught the writer that most of the members have a hunger and desire for this type of ministry but lack the exposure and confidence to express their desire in writing. Members are usually eager to do something about inequality and generally like to experience different aspects of our African culture which is a good sign to the writer.

While conducting this process the writer was involved with an organization called The Federation of Interfaith clergy of Northwest Indiana. The Federation has been involved in two fights with the Redevelopment Authority of Northwest Indiana concerning jobs for residents of the most disparaged regions in Northwest Indiana. The

writer made the members of TUCCG aware of an action on November 24<sup>th</sup> after worship service to protest in front of the homes of members of the RDA for jobs. To the writer's surprise and delight at least twenty persons from TUCCG participated in the protest. Despite the lateness of the hour, despite the cold temperatures and despite having to ride on uncomfortable school buses the members from the writer's congregation were the most members from any one church to attend the protest rally.

The other learning that the writer observed during the process is that members have been asking for Bible study that addresses the African presence in the Bible and books to read on the subject. Members also have been developing ways to promote signage that is a symbol of African pride around the church along with developing African names for different ministries in the church. Each Sunday members in the congregations want to be updated on different opportunities for activism and look for updates in the bulletin.

This is an encouragement to the writer to train persons in the congregation to teach, develop and organize members to not only do social justice action but articulate their story as a people.

What the writer has learned is that prophetic preaching informs and inspires but is not and should not be the only means of motivation. The membership of TUCCG has taught the writer that along with preaching they need an opportunity to express their concerns for the needs of people and avenues to engage themselves in deeper study of whom they are and why they are.

**APPENDIX A**  
**SERMON SERIES**

## APPENDIX A SERMON SERIES

### 5 Part Series “Did You Know?” Part 1 “Straighten Up and Fly Right”

Scripture Exodus 3:4-8(NRSV)

Sunday July 14, 2013

Melissa Harris-Perry in her book "Sister Citizen" has an illustration that came from the Post World War II Cognitive Psychology research on field dependence done by the Federal Government.

"In the study people were placed in a Crooked Chair, in a Crooked Room, with Crooked doors, Crooked Windows and Crooked Pictures on the wall and asked to align themselves Vertically.

This study revealed that some of the people perceived themselves as Straightened only in relation to their Crooked Surroundings; The Researchers were surprised that Some people could be tilted as far as 35 degrees and report that they were perfectly straight simply because they were aligned with images that were equally as titled.

Then there were those who managed to get themselves more or less upright regardless of how Crooked the surrounding images were."

Beloved, in a Crooked Room some people will struggle mightily to stand straight in a Crooked Room (*These are those who are never comfortable in Crooked Conditions*) while others will find ways to put up and adjust their lives to their Crooked Conditions (*Those are people who say "That's just the way things are"*) and then there are those who will so accept Crooked conditions that they will lie to themselves thinking that being Crooked

is really normal (*These are those who fight you for pointing out that they live in a Crooked Room*).

But can I tell you that A Social Justice Gospel does not accept a Crooked Room as Normal, it does not try to make the Best of Crooked conditions and it does not just fight to stand Straight in a Crooked Room but Social Justice Gospel is Unflinching in Fixing the Crooked State of Affairs, it is Committed to Correcting the Crooked Conditions; It is Resolute about Rectifying the Crooked Room.

That's what Social Justice means to fight whoever to Change Conditions that cause people to Conform to Unhealthy, Unsafe, and Unjust Crooked Conditions, wherever, and whatever and they are.

And if I may add America is like a Crooked Room! America is a Crooked Room where Black people are conditioned to sit in the Crooked Chair of the Criminal Injustice System; A System that will Incarcerate for 20 years a physically Abused Black woman by the name of Marissa Alexander of Jacksonville, Fla. For firing a gun in the ceiling hitting or hurting No one, But Acquit a White Male for stalking and killing a Black Boy Trayvon Martin for buying skittles and an Arizona.

America is a Crooked Room with the Crooked Windows of White Supremacy that time and time again demonstrate that to them Black Life is still 3/5ths human and not as precious as White lives.

America is a Crooked Room that has Crooked Doors of Opportunity for Wealthy, Well off and Privilege white males, but only Oppression, Obstinacy and Obstacles for Black, Brown & Poor people!



America is a Crook Room with Crooked Pictures on its Crooked Walls of Mass Incarceration of Black & Brown youth for Profit, Mass Drone Killings of innocent people in Arab countries for Oil, Forced Feeding of Detainees on a hunger strike at Guantanamo who have not been charged with anything and have been cleared to be released after 9 years of torture!

And some people have given up and accepted these conditions as "*that's just the way things are,*" others have bought into them as if it is normal for one group of people to be demonized for the way they are born and there are others who fight to stand up in these Crooked conditions BUT the Church of Jesus Christ has been called to Correct these Crooked Conditions to help bring the Just Rule of the Kingdom of Heaven right here on earth!

And that is why today I want to address the origins of this thing we call Social Justice as a Blue Print, a Guide and a frame work for the daily living of people who claim to be children of *The God of Heaven, The ancient of Days, The I Am that I Am!*

I want to suggest to you that God in fact is the creator of this road map to Righteous Relationship with God called Social Justice!

And my evidence that God is the Author of Social Justice as an essential part of one's faith is right here in the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Exodus.

Moses who is known in the annals of biblical history as "*The Servant of The LORD*" has been in self-Exile in Midian for 40 years.

Moses was born in some troubling times. According to all indications Moses was not expected to live past infancy. Why you ask because Moses was born during a time

here the Policies of the Government sent the Police and gun toting Neighborhood Watch wannabe Police into the community to Kill Black boy babies!

However 2 Black Women Shiprah & Puah who were Midwives defied the Government's Oppressive Policies by letting the boys live because they were more Devoted to God (Social Justice).

Moses however was spared by Serendipitous circumstances and raised unbeknownst to Pharaoh as a Subversive among his Offspring.

Here Moses is in the text about 80 years old and God uses Fire to get Moses Attention (*God knows how to get your attention - fire will get your attention*)! God then Attracts Moses to him because of the spectacle of a Bush Burning but not Burning Up (*God also knows how to draw you to God*)! Moses gets to the Spot then God Addresses Moses by name, "*Moses, Moses!*" (*God knows your name because God has been watching you all the while*)

God then Alerted Moses that he was on Holy Ground, "*Do not come any closer, but take off your sandals for the place you are standing is Holy Ground.*" (*When the presence of God appears to Address you, you cannot stand in that Presence any kind of way*)! After God got Moses Attention, After God Attracted Moses, After God Addressed Moses by name and After God Alerted Moses God then Acquainted Moses with God, "*I Am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.*"

Later on God will give Moses God's name, *Yahweh*, The *LORD* or *I Am, that I Am*. But what is important here is that Moses did not know God until now! (*One clue is back in Exodus 2:22 where Moses and his fine Black African Wife Zipporah have a Son*

*and Moses names him Gershom (Gershom means “Alien there,” or “I have become an Alien in a Foreign Land”)*

When Joseph was in Exiled in Egypt and he and his equally fine Black African wife Asenah had their two children in Gen. 41:51-52, Joseph named the first Manasseh = *“God has made me forget all my troubles and my Father’s household”* He named his 2<sup>nd</sup> son Ephraim= *“God has made me Fruitful in the land of my Suffering.”* When you know God you still use God’s name even when storms arise, and When trouble comes with packed bags to stay you still use God’s name in everything!

Always God is in the naming to help one forget the Pain of the past; Always God is in the name to help one see that even in Suffering God can Sustain you and make you fruitful! But Moses only thinks of being alienated and no mention of God because he did not know God until now!

This is also important because the first time God makes God’s self-known to Moses God does that in the context of a Social issue that God needs addressed by Moses! *(This was not about going to heaven; this was not about having a Saved Seat in Glory; This was not about confessing a Name to keep one’s butt out of Hell)!*

When God makes God’s self-known to Moses, Moses becomes Alarmed because Moses realizes that his life is in Danger! Some things in life are so Good so Brilliant that you cannot take them in their purest state they have to cut with something or dimmed down for us to interact with them.

If a person takes Pure Heroin or *“Black Tar Heroin”* they will die because of its potency, it has to be cut with something; The Sun is so bright that the human eye cannot take it in its purest most powerful state!

Therefore God is so Holy, So Sacred and So Beautiful that we cannot look upon God's face and live God has to be Cut with Something else for us to Behold God = You call him Jesus! After Moses becomes Alarmed God then Apprises Moses on the Suffering Situation God's people are in, *"I have the Misery of my People. I have Heard them crying out because of their slave drivers and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them..."*

And Finally God Assigns Moses to be God's Ally in Advocating for God's people to Affront Pharaoh (Verse 10) *"So now go. I am sending you to tell Pharaoh Let my people go..."* Or in the words of Nat King Cole tell Pharaoh *"To Straighten Up and Fly Right!"*

Here's my point God did not get involved with what was going on with God's people because the people were obedient to God, it was about Oppression! God did not take sides because they were privileged with Bling Bling confused as Blessings; it was because of their Poverty. God did not come to help them because they were Holy; it was because of the living Hell they were going through! God was not moved because of their Spiritual commitment God was moved because of their Social Status.

And right here when God told Moses to tell Pharaoh to *"Straighten Up and Fly Right"* God created Social Justice as the lynch pin of all Faith!

God was showing us that to truly be faithful to God means we must *"See"* the Suffering of others; That We must *"Hear"* their cries for help; We must *"Feel"* great compassion for them so much so that *"Do"* something to help relieve them from their suffering!

Beloved maybe God right now is trying to get our Attention, Maybe God is trying to Attract God's Church so that God can Address God's people by name; maybe God wants to Alert us that the "*Earth is The Lord's...*" and Acquaint God's self to us; Maybe we have not been Sufficiently Alarmed of the Awesome Presence of God;

And perhaps God is trying to Advise us of the Seriousness of the Situation so that we can stop playing church and be the Church; Because God needs to Appoint Us as God's Ally in Advocating for God on behalf of God's People to Affront the Pharaohs of the Life who Profile our innocent children!

And beloved I need to tell you that the Good news for me is, I am so glad that we serve a God who Sees us! God Sees the Shenanigans of this unjust System that we are Subjected to!

God Sees the Senseless killings in the Streets and God Sees the Insensitivity of Pathetic Preachers Pimping Politicians; And God Sees those ditches and stumbling blocks haters are putting in your way!

I am So glad we Serve a God who Sees; But I am also Glad we serve a God who Hears! God hears your cries for help and for hope!

But God also Feels! People can see what you are going through and people can hear your cries for help but if they don't feel your pain their involvement with you will end there.

But I'm so glad our God ain't like that! God Feels you! God Feels your Feelings of Emptiness; God Feels your Longings for true Love; God Feels the Breaking of your Heart!

And because God Sees, and Because God Hears and Because God Feels God will  
Do something about your Situation!

You know it should not take the Senseless death of a child and the Grieving of a  
mother or parent to make folks wake up and fight back against injustice!

Emmett Till was murdered in Money, MS in August of 1955 and his Mourning  
Mother Mamie Till Mosley displayed her pain for the entire world to see in 1955 (*And by  
the way an All-white jury acquitted the white men who killed him also*)

September 15, 1963, 4 little girls in Sunday School were killed by a Bomb in 16<sup>th</sup>  
Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, AL and a White man by the name of Robert  
Chambliss a proud member of the KKK is given a slap on the wrist and let go. Mothers  
and fathers were left grieving over the deaths of their Children and injustice of this  
System.

And here we are 58 years after Mamie Till Mosley and 50 years after 4 little girls  
another Black Mother is crying, another Black father's heart is broken and another Black  
child is dead – It should not take the death of a child, and the Grieving of a mother to  
make us wake up and fight back!

But one Dark Friday on a Hill outside Jerusalem, a Hill called Calvary another  
Black young man was put to death by the hands of White Men, Another Black mother  
was grieving as they ridiculed her dying son hanging from that Old rugged Cross!

They didn't even let her Bury her son that day but they put him in a borrowed tomb and  
left him there Satisfied about their Despicable Deed!

But early on Sunday morning God was not Satisfied and God.

## Did You Know? Pt. 2

### "It Takes A Nation Of Millions to Hold Us Back!"

Scripture Psalm 118:22-23(NRSV)

Sunday July 21, 2013

There is a difference between being equal and being fair. We don't have to be equal with people but as followers of Jesus Christ we should be fair with people. That is because everybody does not need the same thing but everybody should be loved and nurtured.

And in this second installment of the series "Did you know" I want you to know that God is not equal with us but God is fair! God does not treat each of us equally but God is fair with all of us.

When you hear preachers say "*Favor ain't fair*" Oh yes it is "*Favor is Fair, it is not Equal,*" because God knows that everybody cannot handle some stuff right now in their life.

God is not equal with us but God is Fair. I know that is a hard pill for some of us to swallow because we think that we are the "*Chips, Dip with Sauce on the Side*" but God knows you, better than you may know yourself!

God knows who can be mature, sensitive and nurturing with God's Shekinah and God also knows who will be mean, stingy and self-centered with God's Glory. You can't look at what somebody else has or what they are doing and think that you should have or be doing the same thing too.

You don't know their story so you should not hate on or covet their Glory. You don't know what God has put them through in life; You don't know the weight God has placed on their life; You don't know the Wilderness that God has walked them through to get where they are now.

Beloved God is not equal with us but God is fair with us!

And God takes sides! Did you know that not only is God the creator and author of Social Justice as a lynch pin of all faith but God takes sides in history.

God takes sides in history on the side of the oppressed! James Cone has a powerful book titled "God Of The Oppressed!" And that is Because the god of the Slave Owner and the God of the Slave are not the same God.

The god of Corporate Greed and meanness (Like the Koch Brothers & Fox News) is not the same God of the poor, and disinherited.

The god of this Injustice System of Mass Incarceration and Stand Your Ground laws which allowed the jury to let Trayvon's killer not only go free But arm himself again is not the Same God as Sybrina Fulton, Tracy Martin and Marissa Alexander.

And the god of those people who can smile in your face while stabbing you in the back is not the same God as those who are just trying to be a blessing to God's people. And that is because God, the God of Eternal Glory, The God of Heaven, and The God who can do anything but fail is the God of the Oppressed in history not of the Oppressor!

God takes sides in history because it is the Oppressed that have needed help in history. It is the Downtrodden who need a lift; It is the Broken who need healing!



The late Howard Thurman in his autobiography titled “With Head and Heart” recalls the day he took his little daughters to Daytona Beach Florida where he had grown up:

*On one of our visits to Daytona Beach I was eager to show my daughters some of my early haunts. We sauntered down the long street from the church to the riverfront. This had been the path of the procession to the baptismal ceremony in the Halifax River...At length we passed the playground of one of the white public schools. As soon as Olive and Anne saw the swings, they jumped for joy. “Look, Daddy, let’s go over and swing!” This was the inescapable moment of truth that every black parent in America must face sooner or later.*

*What do you say to your child at the critical moment of primary encounter? “You can’t swing in those swings.”*

*“Why, Daddy?” Anne pressed for the answer,” I said, “It is against the law for us to use those swings, even though it is a public school. Only white children can play there.*

*But it takes the state legislature, the courts, the sheriffs and policemen, the white churches, the mayors, the banks and businesses, and the majority of white people in the state of Florida—it takes all these to keep two little black girls from swinging in those swings. That is how important you are! Never forget, the estimate of your own importance and self worth can be judged by how much power people are willing to use to keep you in the place they have assigned to you. You are two very important little girls.*

And beloved in the words of Public Enemy which is the title to this second installment "It takes a Nation of Millions to hold us back!" That's just how important you

are (We gone deal with the you in this Social Justice of God next week)!

That's why Voter Suppression Laws are popping up all over the Country; That's why The Supreme Court Stepped in to Kill The Voting Rights Act; That's why Stand Your Ground Laws have been set up!

That's why Mass Incarceration for Non-violent Drug offenses are feeding the Prison for Profit system in this Country.

That's why they are closing public schools in Chicago, Gary and all over the nation in the Inner City Blues!

That's why "Pay day" loan stores litter the landscape in the Black and Brown community!

That's why we have Sequester Austerity making people take unpaid furloughs. That's why Banks won't lend you money to start businesses in your community and The State of Indiana is taking over your Airport in Gary without hiring 1 Black person!

These Demonic Power have more Respect for your Potential than you do! People are Scared of you coming together to change this System for the Better! "It Takes A Nation of Millions to hold you back, beloved!" And when this kind of raw naked power comes against you and me, Don't you ever forget God gets into the fight with us!

So the next time you feel overwhelmed and all alone because of all the weight problems, predicaments and policies that you have no power over in your way; Powers that are designed to put you down and prohibit you from your purpose please know that those powers are not the last word!

Please know that The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, The God of Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel got more power in one hand than the Devil has in All of hell and that God is on your side!

Remember the words of James Russell Lowell, *"Truth Forever on The Scaffold, Wrong Forever on the Throne, But That Scaffold Sways the Future and Beyond the Dim unknown Stands God in the Shadows Keeping Watch Above His Own!"*

Don't you ever forget the words of Charles Albert Tindley, *"Harder Yet maybe the Fight right may often yield to might, Wickedness awhile may reign and Satan's cause may seem to gain BUT there is a God who rules above with hand of power and heart of Love and if I'm right He'll fight my battles, We shall have Peace Someday!"*

God made a promise to you that your God *"Would never leave you or Forsake you,"* I don't know about you but *"I've Seen the Lightning Flash and heard the Thunder ROLL, I've felt sins breakers dashing trying to conquer my Soul; But I heard the Voice of Jesus telling me to Still Fight on - No never alone, No, never alone!"*

And when *"Enemies rise against you and the host of hell assails you and your Strength begins to fail, you are with a God who has never lost a battle - You stand on Sacred ground and say "Stand By Me, Lord, Stand By Me!!!!!"*

When you have been Oppressed, Suppressed and Depressed like we have been in this country you know something about Rejection!

You know what it feels like to be denied even though you did all the right things!

You know what it is like to be dismissed despite having acquired all the proper documents.

You know what it is like to be looked over despite coming in first place! Let me tell you this:

He was born Nesta Robert Marley in 1945 to the imbalanced relationship of his 17 yr. Old Afro-Jamaican mother Cedella Booker and a 50 yr. old White Plantation overseer father by the name of Captain Norvel Marley.

Bob Marley grew up angry at his father for abandoning him and his mother and never financially or emotionally supporting them.

As a young adult Marley hung out with Rabble rousers by the name of Rude Boys and Marley was feared as someone always willing to fight; Marley found comfort in music and became the main man in music among the Rude Boys; One day Bob Marley built up the nerve to go to his father's family who owned a factory for a loan to buy a car.

But Bob was Harshly Rejected by his father's family and left with Sadness in his heart that would soon turn into a song.

Not long after that incident his career took off for the Stars and he penned these words to music "The Stone That The Builders Rejected, has now become the Cornerstone!" (Jah Rastafari!!!)

And in the documentary of his life one of his father's family members who had previously rejected him had to admit "*That Bob Marley was now the Only Marley because nobody knows about the others now!*" (Respect Man!)

And that's how the Psalmist raised his voice that has reverberated throughout the corridors of history saying in Psalm 118:22-23 "The Stone that the builders Rejected has become the Cornerstone for this is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes!"

Yes, it Takes A Nation of Millions to Hold us Back but God takes Sides in history to flip the Script on Slave Owners by “*Setting a Table before those who Suffer in the Presence of your enemies!*”

God Turns the Tables on the Tyrants of History by making “*All things work together for the Good of them who Love the Lord and are called according to God’s purpose!*”

God takes sides against the Oppressors in History to “*Turn what they meant for evil into good.*”

Social Justice was not only Created by God as a Lynch pin of all true faith but it shows us that God also Takes sides with the Oppressed against Oppressors in History!

“The Stone that the Builders rejected have become the Cornerstone! It is the Lord’s doing and it is Marvelous in our eyes!”

How does God make the Stone that the Builders rejected into the Cornerstone?

First God takes Rejection and turns it into Redemption! God Redeems those who have been Discarded as somehow defective!

God Redeems those who have been treated like Trash and thrown away; And God Redeems those who have been dumped on the Scrap heap of life! (I was discarded, I was Thrown away, I was dumped on the scrap heap of life in an EMH class in 5<sup>th</sup> Grade by an insensitive, uncaring teacher – But God Redeemed me by Ms. Ramey in the 6<sup>th</sup> Grade who saw potential in me; Who saw promise in me, who saw great Possibility in me because “*God will see the Best you when everyone else can only see the Worst in you!*”

Secondly God turns Rejection into Restoration! Do you realize what a Cornerstone is? *The Cornerstone is the first Stone Set in Construction of a Masonry Foundation (Hiram) – It is essential because ALL other Stones are set in reference to the Cornerstone, which will ultimately determine the Position of the Entire Structure!*

If you have been Displaced God Restores you to the Proper Position of Importance that you were destined for before the Foundations of the World!

If you have been pushed around in life because of how you look or how you were born God Restores you to the Place of prominence that God ordained for you!

If you have been Put Down by People with Political Power, Economic Power and Military Power then know that God will Restore you to a Place where others have line up with your life!

And can I tell you this? The Stone that the Builders of this Country Rejected, as 3/5ths human;

The Stone that the Builders of this nation rejected, in the Hayes/Tilden Compromise, Black Codes, and the Dred Scott Decision;

The Stones that the Builders of this Republic Rejected, in Plessey Vs. Ferguson, Jim Crow, and Second Class Citizenship, The Stone that the Builders Rejected has Now become The Cornerstone of Democracy in President Barack, Michelle, Malia & Sasha Obama!

Finally yes it takes a Nation of Millions to Hold us back BUT God shows us that “The Stone that the Builders Rejected Has become the Cornerstone because God Takes

sides with the Oppressed to Turn Rejection into Redemption; God Turns Rejection into Restoration and God Turns Rejection into Recognition!

“The Stone that the Builders Rejected has become the Cornerstone! This is The Lord’s Doing and it is Marvelous in our eyes!” That is the Recognition that you beloved are not a Footnote in History but you are Central Subjects in History;

Recognition that you are not Objects to be manipulated but Subjects to be Respected!

Recognition that you are a thing to be Used but a Person to be Loved!  
Recognition!

This is Nelson Mandela Day because Madiba made 95 on last Thursday July 18<sup>th</sup>.

To say “It Takes a nation of Millions to hold us back” is an understatement when looking at his life –

Born literally into Royalty but choosing to give that up to fight for his oppressed black South African people!

Jailed for speaking truth to power; Lost the connection to his Wife and children; Lost friends in the struggle who were either Banned from South Africa, Jailed with him on Robben Island or Killed, like Steve Biko, Hector Pieterse and Chris Hani!

Madiba Lost the most productive part of his life in the 27 year sentence on his life and he lost partial sight in his eyes because of the dust from breaking rocks in the lime quarries!

But he did gain something's – He Gained Tuberculosis from the Dank conditions in his cell!

He gained the Ire of Dick Cheney who called him a Terrorist who should remain in prison and Voted against Mandela being released in 1986.

But ultimately He gained his Freedom in February of 1990 and I will never forget the Iconic moment when he stood before his people.

The First words Nelson Mandela spoke were "Amandla"=Power and millions of Black South Africans responded with "A We Tu"=To The People!

But God had written this script way before Mandela – God fulfilled the Psalmist words in the mouth of a Black African man by the Name of Jesus!

Jesus told his disciples in Matthew, Mark and Luke, "The Stone That the Builders Rejected has Now become the Cornerstone!"

They didn't know it then but Jesus was telling them that he would be Rejected on an Old Rugged Cross; That he would be Broken between Two Thieves, that he would be "Wounded for our Transgression, Bruised for our Iniquities; The Chastisement of our Peace would be upon him and By His Stripes WE would be Healed!"

How could we be healed by his Stripes you ask? It was on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day that God flipped the Script and Redeemed Jesus, God Restored Jesus and God gave Jesus the Recognition he deserved with all power in his hands!!!

And the bible says "*Wherefore God has also Highly Exalted Him and given him a Name that is above every other name...*"



**“Did You Know?”**  
**Pt. 3 “Two Thousand Seasons”**

Scripture Genesis 41:38-40; 45-46; 50-52; 57      Sunday July 28, 2013

The opening to Chancellor William’s book “The Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of a Race from 4500 B.C. to 200A.D.”

*“What became of the Black people of Sumer?’ the traveler asked the old man, for ancient records show that the people of Sumer were Black. ‘What happened to them?’ ‘Ah,’ the old man sighed. ‘They lost their history, so they died.’”*

And then the opening words of Ayi Kwei Armah’s Book, “Two Thousand Seasons”

*“We are not a people of yesterday. Do they ask how many single seasons we have flowed from our beginning till now? We shall point them to the proper beginning of their counting. On a clear night when the light of the moon has blighted the ancient woman and her seven children, on such a night tell them to go alone into the world. There, have them count first the one, then the seven, and after the seven all the other stars visible to their eyes alone...After the stars then the sand and after the sand then the raindrops in the ocean.”*

*“A people losing sight of origins are dead. A people deaf to purposes are lost. Under fertile rain, in scorching sunshine there is no difference: Their bodies are mere corpses, awaiting final burial.”*

I grow sadder by the year at the sorrow sight of my people of African Ancestry in particular here in North America.

I grow sadder by the year seeing Reality Television (Which in reality is not reality at all) define Black womanhood as catty, crass and uncooperative and uncommitted to any cause beyond a "Shop till you Drop" mentality. .

Do you know I cringed whenever I hear Black women say "*I don't have females as friends because women are too messy, I have more men as friends...*"

I cringe because the women who say those things have announced that they are part of the problem of black women getting along, working together and being bigger than infantile silly petty issues with one another (*She rolled her eyes at me or she thinks she so cute*)!

I grow sadder by the year seeing Black men who have not read or studied anything, Men who are not committed to any cause beyond running their mouths about what they think.

Black men who proudly declare how many babies they have by different women that they never intended to marry as if that is a badge of honor; Black men who spend gullible women's money and at 40 years old with children all over the place who still live with their enabling mothers.

I grow sadder by the year seeing Black people who do not want to be Black, and especially do not want to be African, Black people who will celebrate "Cinco De Mayo," "The Polish Festival," "The Chinese New Year," Eat Asian food, buy Italian Pizza but won't read one book by an Africans like Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, or Carlos Moore!

Black people who will not listen to African musicians like Fela Kuti, Hugh Masekela, Mama Africa (Miriam Makeba), or Bookman Exsperian!

Black people who do not know Queen Yaa Asante Waa, Queen Nzingha, Sobonfu Some, Malidoma Patrice Some, John Garang, John Mbiti, Drusilla Dunjee Houston, Zora Neale Hurston, Martin Delaney, David Walker or Bobby Wright!

Black people who care to even know that African civilization is the first civilization on earth; Black people who don't care to know that the first African civilizations were Matriarchal and Matrilineal - That means that Great Black African Women governed and Guided the first great civilizations of the world!

There is no equivalent in Europe or Asia to these Matriarchal & Matrilineal societies that produced the Great Queens like Queen Hatshepsut, Queen Nefertiti, Queen Tiye, Queen Nefertari, The Queens known as Candaces and the Queen of Sheba found in your Bibles;

There is absolutely no Equivalent to these Great Black African Sisters!

If you found out that your Grandfather or Grandmother invented the Cell phone or Computer you would not stop talking about them -

Then why don't you let your family, Friends, Neighbors and the world know that your Ancestors Invented Mathematics, Astronomy, Architecture, Music, Philosophy and Medicine?

The title of this 3rd Installment is borrowed from the book by Ayi Kwei Armah "Two Thousand Seasons"

Beloved we are not a people of yesterday, we are a people where there are not enough Stars to count our beginnings; There's not enough grains of sand on the seashore or raindrops in the ocean to count the years of our beginnings! We are a people of "In The Beginning!"

Two Thousand Seasons only numbers the years of our Subjugation first by the Arabs (who took us from our villages farther East and then by the Europeans who learned to enslave us from the Arabs).

I grow sadder each year as Black people who do not want to be African refuse to accept that the very bibles you carry around are full of African People, Culture and history.

Every book and every letter written in your bible is authored by an African! There are NO European or Asian writers at all in your bibles up to and including that Black African named Jesus (There are however European interpreters & Redactors of your bibles)

And when we talk about this subject of Social Justice and the ignorance of these facts displayed by my people in particular and most people in general it becomes extremely troubling for me.

Two Thousand Seasons of brutality, Two Thousand Seasons of Mutilations, Two Thousand Seasons of Kidnappings, Two Thousand Seasons of the rape of our women, Two Thousand seasons of the Torture of our children, Two Thousand Seasons of the Stealing of our Wealth, Two Thousand Seasons of the draining of our communities, Two Thousand Seasons of the MisEducation of our Children, Two Thousand Seasons of the Jailing of our Revolutionaries, Two Thousand Seasons of the Killings of our Heroes and Sheroes;

Two Thousand Seasons of Lying about our Intellectual capacities, Two Thousand Seasons of Sinister Science that said we are closer to animals, Two Thousand Seasons of

Media Mendacity about us, Two Thousand Seasons of Injustice in the for profit Criminal Injustice system, Two Thousand Seasons where "*We have come over a way that with Tears has been watered; we have come treading a Path through the Blood of the slaughtered.*"

I cannot speak for you but I will never forget and I will never stop fighting for what is right!

Some of you may not understand which is why you get bogged down in petty foolishness about "Who you don't like, or who you say you can't work with or who is a drama queen or king," but "*as for Me and My House...!*"

Did you know that Social Justice was created by God as a lynch pin of all true faith and that Gods takes sides in history with the oppressed which is the main focus of a Social Justice mindset?

Did you know that As Professor Jerome Ross has pointed out from Genesis to Revelation the entire bible you have addresses one of 5 kinds of oppression, from Egyptian Oppression, Babylonian Oppression, Persian Oppression, Greek Oppression and Roman Oppression?

But Did you know that God partnered first with Africans to create a Social Justice mentality!

Your people were the first people God partnered with to bring Justice to those Oppressed.

Now please understand God nor anywhere in the bible is it called "Social Justice!" Why, because it was always called being faithful!

It was only in these latter days that Social Justice had to be clearly define and differentiated from the generic, come to church for social club selfish form of Christianity that most people in this Country participate in each week instead of Servant centered discipleship ministry.

But beloved God created Social Justice as a Lynch pin of all true faith and God sides with the Oppressed in history to bring Justice to them and God first Partnered with your people to carry out Social Justice!

In your bibles you find people fighting one of 5 kinds of Oppression- Egyptian, Babylonian, Persian, Greek and Roman oppression

And please know that all but two of those instances of Oppression are African on African

Which also reaffirms what my Pastor Jeremiah Wright said for 36 years "Everybody your color is not your kind and Everybody not your color is not your enemy"

And that why this text of Genesis is so important!

It illustrates two very important pictures. The first is that here you have Africans working together for the good of humanity. The Black African Hebrews here represented by Joseph and the Black Africans of Egypt are working together to save the lives of people all over the known world.

There will be a famine that will be severe and people will be able to come to Egypt and get food because of the cooperation of Joseph and Pharaoh.

And they both Joseph and Pharaoh give reverence to God (verses 38-39 "*Pharaoh said to his servants, can we find anyone else like this-one in whom is the spirit of God?*")

*So Pharaoh said to Joseph, Since God has shown you all this, there is no one so discerning and wise as you."*

When African people put their own petty differences aside (*Differences like "who's in charge?" "Who gets the credit?" "Who is more important?"*) we can literally save the world!

African people in the text are working together to deliver others as a Social Justice endeavor (Now they did not start having drama with one another until they stopped telling their own story - Exodus says *"There arose a King in Egypt who did not know Joseph..."* Why didn't he know Joseph, because they the Egyptians and the Hebrews Stopped telling their story and it led to them turning on one another rather than turning to each other.)

\*\*\*Footnote\*\*\* When you don't Trust your Story, When you don't Treasure your Story and when you don't Teach your Story you will raise a generation that will turn on one another rather than to one another!

In March of 1972 The National Black Political Convention brought over 10,000 Black Union, Black Politicians and Black Activist to Gary, IN Westside High school!

Black folks from Mississippi to Maryland, New Mexico-New York; New Hampshire-North Carolina, California-Chicago! And on Westside high school's stage sat Coretta Scott-King and Betty Shabbaz!

And Because Gary, IN at Westside High hosted the Greatest of gatherings of Black folks in history who formed a Political Platform for Black progress and over the next 10 years Black elected officials grew from some 1,500 to well over 5,000 (There

would be no President Barack Obama if there had been no National Black Political Convention in Gary, IN at Westside High school)!

But right now there is no statute, no memorial, no plaque at Westside High school remembering that here History was made –

And just 24 years after the National Black Political convention in Gary, Gary's Black residents who are 95% of the Population elected a White Man to be the Mayor of Gary twice (And the Negro Clergy in Gary Presented this Piranha to the people and vouched for him)!!!

When you don't Trust your Story, When you don't Treasure your Story and when you don't teach your story you will raise a generation of Black people who will Turn On one another rather than too one another!

That's what happened to Black folks in Gary and that's what happened to the Black Hebrews and Black Egyptians here in Genesis!

The second illustration however shows us something even more personal and that is when you partner with God to help bring the Kingdom of Heaven right here on earth you are going to be the target of attacks in your own associations!

What the Joseph story teaches me is that Sometimes the people who *Hinder* you, who *Hate* on you and *Hurt* your *Heart* the most are the people who are supposed to have your Back!

Joseph's brothers hated on him (Gen. 37:4) for something Joseph had no control over, his father's Love. Joseph could not help that his Daddy favored him over them; Joseph was not responsible for his Daddy's Jacob's mess (Jacob was a mess – Jacob laid down and had sex with a woman he did not love and had babies by her;



Jacob impregnated his other wife's best friend at her request because she could not have children; Both women thought giving Jacob more babies would make him love them and Jacob did not have the integrity to say no!)

Somebody here or somebody you know laid down with a man you did not love thinking that giving him a baby would make him love you!

Some brother in here or a brother you know smashed a woman you did not love because you just wanted some sex but now you a baby by her and a big mess on your hands because you played with somebody's heart!

Joseph was not responsible for his daddy's mess and his brothers should have taken it out on their daddy not Joseph

Secondly Sometimes the people who *Doubt* you, who *Disregard* and *Disrespect* your *Dreams* the most are the people who should Defend you.

Instead of his brothers encouraging him Joseph and defending Joseph and his dream so it could develop they doubted him, they disregarded and disrespected his dream.

Lastly Sometimes the very people who will *Dump* you into a *Ditch of Despair* because of your *Dreams* are the ones who eat *Dinner* with you at the same table (Didn't Jesus say "*The One who Dips his hand in the bowl with me is the one who will betray me.*")

But God shows me that if you hold to God's unchanging hands and if you remain willing to use what little you have to help make sure others have what they need especially when you are in a Wilderness situation God sometimes Gives you Grace to get you through!

What was supposed to Eliminate Joseph God used to Elevate Joseph! His brothers dumped him in a ditch/pit But God used some Ishmaelite's to pull him out and spare his life!

He was Sold as a Slave to Potiphar But God gave him favor with Potiphar and elevated him to overseer of his whole house because of his hard work!

Potiphar's wife Lied on Joseph and got him thrown into Prison, BUT God gave him favor with the Guard!

The Cup Bearer forgot all about Joseph when he got his freedom BUT God made him remember Joseph when Pharaoh had a dream and God Elevated Joseph to Second in command in all of Egypt!

If you hold to God's unchanging hand and are willing to use what you have to make sure others have what they need especially when you are in a Wilderness situation God sometimes gives you Grace to get through it, so that you look better when you come out than when you went in!

Next thing the text also teaches me is that Because Joseph Gave God the Credit God gave Joseph the Blessing to not only forget his Frustrations but become Fruitful despite his Frustrations!

Joseph named his first born "*Manasseh = God made me forget my frustrations and my father's house.*"

He named his second son "*Ephraim=God made me fruitful in the land of my Frustrations!*"

Finally because Joseph Trusted God with the little he had (what did he have? All Joseph had was a Dream and the willingness to work hard in some harsh situations)

God Trusted Joseph to take care of God's people all over God's World (Verse 57 -  
*"Moreover, All the world came to Joseph in Egypt to buy grain, because the famine  
 became severe throughout the world"(!)*)

Beloved this thing called Social Justice is what God Created as a Lynch pin of all  
 Faith so that we can have more DooYaLuIah rather than so much Hallelujah!

This God created Social Justice shows us that God sides with the Oppressed in  
 history!

And God first Partnered With African People to bring about God's Plan of  
 Deliverance, Liberation, and Salvation for the World!

Beloved I'm so glad that we serve a God *Who can turn your Stumbling Blocks  
 into Stepping Stones!*

I'm so glad that We serve a God *who can turn that End in the Road into a Bend in  
 The Road!*

I'm so glad that we Serve a God who still *"Take a Crooked Stick and Hit a  
 Straight Lick!"*

*"God can take what others meant for evil and turn it around into God!"*

I'm glad, anybody Glad?

Jesus, I'll Never Forget what you've done for me!

### **"Did You Know Pt. 4 Fight The Power"**

Scripture Luke 4: 16-21(NRSV) Sunday August 4, 2013

A father and a baby camel were lying around, and suddenly the baby camel asked, "Father, may I ask you some questions? Father said, "Sure! Why son, is there something bothering you? Baby said, "Why do camels have humps?" Father said "Well son, we are desert animals, we need the humps to store water and we are known to survive without water". Baby said, "Okay, then why are our legs long and our feet rounded?" Father said, "Son, obviously they are meant for walking in the desert. You know with these legs I can move around the desert better than anyone does!" Baby said, "Okay, then why are our eyelashes long? Sometimes it bothers my sight". Father with pride said, "My son, those long thick eyelashes are your protective cover. They help to protect your eyes from the desert sand and wind".

Baby after thinking said, "I see. So the hump is to store water when we are in the desert, the legs are for walking through the desert and these eye lashes protect my eyes from the desert then what in god's name are we doing here in the Zoo!?"

In other words you can have the right equipment and all the right resources by not know how to use them and not be in the right place or position to utilize them which renders them useless!

Can I suggest to you that there are many people in the church who have gifts and abilities but those gifts and abilities never reach their full potential because either they

don't understand what they have or they are not in the right place or position to utilize them or all of the above!

And in reality many folks are in Churches that are like Zoos where they are on display for spectators in the Sanctuary to come watch them perform but they never live out the true purpose of the faith and the very reason they have the gifts and abilities in the first place.

In fact all of us have gifts and Abilities that go unused or under used because either we don't understand the purpose of what we have and the mission of the faith or we are not in the right places or positions to fully utilize them.

Too many churches are nothing more than a Museum for Saints rather than a Hospital for sick folks!

The Power of the Church of Jesus Christ in far too many cases has been Neutralized by Nonsense; Nullified by Negativity and Negated by the Narcotic of Narcissism and Narcissistic people!

And that is why this text of Luke 4 is so illuminating! Jesus is beginning his earthly ministry in this pericope and announcing his mission statement to the gathered assembly!

And therefore if the Lord of the church announces his mission statement for his earthly ministry then those of us who follow him should take up that same mission for our ministry.

Jesus was baptized by John The Baptist in the Jordan River (That's in Chapter 3) and when he came up out of the water two important things happened; first the Heavens

were opened and the Holy Spirit descended like a dove upon him and the voice of God was heard saying "*This is my beloved son listen to him...*"

The next thing is Jesus is driven by The Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil for 40 days and during that time Jesus ate no food.

Ain't that like life? One minute it seems like the Heavens open in your life and you hear the voice of God in your Heart and the next Moment you are driven into some Hell in the Wilderness of Life!

And what makes this text so troubling for some superficial saints is that God's Spirit was responsible for both!

God's Spirit opened up the Heavens and God's Spirit drove Jesus into the Wilderness hell.

Stop Blaming the Devil for all your Desert situations;

Stop saying the Enemy has me in a hell of a situation many times it is God that has driven your life into a time of trial by fire! (That enemy in your life many times God put them there to keep you humble - Just ask Paul who said "*God sent a messenger of Satan as a Thorn in my side and would not remove it no matter what I did to keep me humble...*"

These activities in the life of Jesus suggest something significant to us about Discipleship. It suggests that there will be celebration because God has chosen you, chosen your congregation, and/or chosen your ministry for sacred assignment.

But it also suggests that there is a time of preparation by way of testing to see if you have the integrity to serve faithfully.

My Pastor taught us along time ago that before you can have the Proclamation you need that Preparation; And if you don't invite God into the Preparation don't expect God to show up in the Proclamation *(that's why I require all ministries who especially minister on Sunday to Pray together before you stand in the Sanctuary to serve - Because that is inviting the Holy Spirit in the Preparation so that the Holy Spirit can show in you in your proclamation)!*

And because Disciples beloved are made not born; You have to be tried, tested and even go through some temptation to see if you have the integrity to be trusted with God's glory!

Before Jesus proclaimed his earthly ministry he had to go through some preparation in the wilderness!

*(Your Wilderness may not be to hurt you but to help you; You Desert experience may not be from the Devil to destroy you but from God to Develop you; Your Attack may not be to Eliminate you but God trying to Equip you?)*

You see the problem is that too many people who claim the name of Jesus Christ are confused about the cost of following Jesus Christ!

Christianity is not a religion for cowards; Being a follower of Jesus is not for the faint hearted or Fraidy cats;

This is a Faith for those willing to Wade in Deep Waters without Wincing; those Willing to Walk through the Fires of Adversity; Followers who are Willing to Face Giants and not flinch;

This is a Faith of Hero's and Heroines!

Ordinary People who are willing to let God do Extra-Ordinary through them in order to bring Hope in Hopeless situations!

Or as in the words of Chuck D and Public Enemy followers of Jesus who have the Faith to "Fight The Power!"

*"Got to give us what we want*

*Gotta give us what we need*

*Our freedom of speech is freedom or death*

*We got to fight the powers that be*

*Lemme hear you say Fight the power!"*

And in Luke 4:16-21 Jesus Shares his Soliloquy on the Gospel of Social Justice whose Foundational principle is to "Fight The Powers that be!"

Did you know that the Lord of the Church has Charged The Church of Jesus Christ to "Fight The Powers, that Be..."

And that is title of this 4th Installment of the series "Did You Know, that Jesus has Charged the Church to Fight The Powers that be...?"

Jesus has Charged us to be Soldiers of Salvation; Jesus has Charged us to be Fighters for Freedom, Jesus has Charged the Church to be Disciples of Deliverance!



And in this text are 3 points I want to give you up front: Jesus Charged the Church here in his Commencement address to “Fight The Powers” (1st) by *Outreach*, (2nd) by *Overcoming* and (3rd) by an *Offer*!

First *Outreach*! Christ has called The Church to *Outreach* by way of an *Overflow*!

Jesus said in verse 18 "*The Spirit Of The Lord is Upon Me...*" The Work of The Lord Requires the *Overflow* of God's Holy Spirit!

If a car can't run without fuel, and a Fish can't swim without Water and people can't live without Blood then Saints of the Savior can't Serve without The Holy Spirit!

You need the Power of The Holy Spirit! Maybe the reason why some of us can't serve The Lord consistently is because we don't have the Power of The Lord?

And look where Jesus was when he Announced the Anointing of The Holy Spirit was upon him - He was in Worship (*In fact he was in worship in a Church with some messy sometimey people*)

Don't tell me that somebody who made you mad makes it impossible for you to receive the blessing of the Holy Spirit in worship; Don't tell me that somebody's presence or performance keeps you from receiving the power of the Holy Spirit - If somebody or something can keep you from Church and receiving the Holy Spirit in church then you are not focused on the right person in the first place!

Beloved you don't come here to get Fed (*That will only make you Satiated, Stout and Slothful!*)

You come here to get Re-fueled to Fight; Which also means that you don't get filled with the Holy Spirit to Stay stuck in the same suffocating Spiritual Stagnation that you were in before the Spirit made you jump up and down and shout! (*Remember it does not matter high you jump when you shout it matters how straight you walk when you come back down*)

Faith is a verb; Faith is an Action Word; Faith means taking an action to Alleviate Apathy – In the Movie “World War Z” Brad Pitts' character tried to save a man and his family from being turned into flesh eating Zombies with the words “Movement is Life.” (*You are made by God to be in motion for the Master; to do Good work for the Way maker; to keep fighting and keep working until the Lord calls you home*)

Faith means life by Fighting the Powers whose objective is to rob you of life!

When the Spirit comes upon you it is always for you to DO something for others that you could not do on your own!

Jesus Charged the Church to Outreach by way of Overflow to Organize the Oppressed!

Who are the Oppressed? Jesus mentions the Poor, Those held Captive, Those suffering spiritual, mental, emotional and physical Blindness, and all who are Prohibited by Political, Economic, Educational, Social and Religious Policies that are designed to Prevent them from living out their Divine Purposes in this life- Those are the Oppressed!

Secondly Jesus has Charged The Church to *Outreach* by way of *Overflow* to *Organize the Oppressed to Overcome* all forms of *Oppression* and *Oppressors*!

Outreach to and Organizing of Oppressed people (In fact Jesus was the First "Community Organizer") And Organizing Oppressed people to stand up to their Oppressors can only be done by The Power of The Holy Spirit working through you and me!

The reason being is that Hurting People will Hurt the very people who are trying to help them!

People who have been Historically Held Down will Hold each other down especially if someone seeks to overcome their Oppressors!

Some Oppressed people see Oppression as the norm for anybody that looks like them. (*You don't believe me Just ask Martin King; Just Ask Jeremiah Wright; Just ask Jesus* – After he preached this sermon they tried to Kill him – look at verse 28)

You need the Holy Spirit to Fight The Powers that be...!

Finally Jesus has Charged The Church to Outreach by way of Overflow to Organize the Oppressed to Overcome all forms of Oppression and Oppressors by Offering them The Good News of An Opportunity to Live an Optimal Life –

Do you understand that because of Social Injustice most people never reach their Full potential in life?

Do you see that because of Unrighteousness and Religious Bigotry many people never Realize their Divine Raison d'être in life?

Do you understand that most people because of Oppressive Policies live their whole lives at a Diminished Capacity?

The Offer of an Opportunity to Live an Optimal Life is called "*The Gospel of Jesus Christ*" or "*The Good News*" which are the same.

The Good News means that Jesus understands Why and How you became Poor!

Back in the 1980's Bishop Dom Helder Camara (Of Brazil) made this statement "*If I feed a Few Hungry people they call me a Saint but when I ask why are there hungry people in the first place, then they say that I am an Enemy of The State!*"

Have you ever asked "Why are there so many Hungry people in the world when there is so much wealth being wasted in this world?"

Have you ever asked why are there children in so many countries in Africa (Like Jonathan saw in Tanzania) who are starving, and families with no electricity, no running water, no sanitary toilet facilities, and living on less than \$2.00 a day when their own Countries have the unlimited wealth of natural resources like Gold, Diamonds, Copper, Coltan and possess the richest Soil on earth to grow food be so poor?

How is it that a person in America can work 40 hrs a week and yet still have to receive public Assistance and be homeless?

Why are so many people in Gary out of work when there are millions of dollars of construction going on all over Gary (*Right across the street there are NO black workers putting up Edge Waters new building*)?

You may not care about those questions but Jesus cares and those who truly want to follow Jesus will ask those kinds of questions!

And because Jesus cares enough to understand and Speak Truth to Power that it is the greed of a Few that keeps the many poor that is Good News to the Poor that somebody understands that it ain't their fault!

But Jesus does not stop there Jesus has the courage to do something about those who are being held captive: captive by out of control Campaign Finance; Captive by Stop & Frisk in Black & Brown Communities; Captive to High Interest Pay Day Loan Stores that litter the Landscape; Captive by the destruction of the Public School system; Captive by Mass Incarceration; Captive by a Conservative Activist Supreme Court that Guts Voting Rights; Captive by Food Deserts and Inadequate Healthcare!

Jesus proclaims Release to the Captives and that is Good News! Jesus is Bold enough to bring Recovery of Sight to the Blind;

People blinded by Governmental Misinformation, Blinded by Corporate Disinformation; Blinded by Media Mendacity, Blinded by Political Chicanery, Blinded by the Façade of Capitalism, Blinded by the Myth of Middle Classness , Blinded by Religious Apartheid, Blinded by Denominational Hegemony, Blinded by Pulpit Pageantry, and Blinded Bad Theology!

Jesus has Charged the church to Recover the Sight of The Blind!

And Jesus is determined to Let The Oppressed Go Free! Nobody should be Poor; Nobody should not have enough; Nobody should be suffering Preventable life Challenges

—

Just like there are Preventable health conditions, there are also Preventable Life Challenges!

In a World where God provided enough water for everybody nobody should go without clean water.

In a World where God made enough food nobody should ever go hungry.

In a World where God made enough natural Resources Nobody should ever not have enough of the things that they need to live on!

The Bible says that "The Earth is The LORD's and the fulness there-of, the World and they that dwell there in..."

God owns the cattle on a thousand hills and God owns the hills to!

This world belongs to God (Not corporations, not governments and not super wealthy 1%) and God made it for everybody to have what they need...

Jesus has Charged the Church to Fight The Powers that be..."

The Religion of Jesus is a Social Justice Gospel that is Good News to those who have been Disinherited, Disallowed, and Disenfranchised!

I told you before that the religion of Jesus is not a "*Pie in the Sky when you die by and by – But the Religion of Jesus is something Sound on the ground by the Pound while you are Still around!*"

That's why The Late Justice R. Eugene Pincham used to say "*Jesus did not come to Earth to make Heaven Better.*"

Beloved, Jesus did not come to get you to Heaven, Jesus came to get the Church to help him “Fight The Powers That Be...” in order to bring Heaven right here on earth!

And that’s why I stand with the songwriter, who said,

*“To Serve This Present Age my calling to Fulfill, Oh May it all my Powers  
Engage to Do my Master’s Will!*

*A Charge To Keep I have!*

Jesus came with an Offer of Good News - Can I share some Good News with you?

Jesus said *“Come unto me all ye who labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest!”*

Jesus said *“Let not your heart be troubled you believe in God believe also in me...”*

Jesus said *“I come that you may have Life and have it more Abundantly”*  
Anybody besides me want the more?

Can I share some more Good news with you?

The bible says *“Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable.*

<sup>29</sup> *He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless.*

<sup>30</sup> *Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted;*

<sup>31</sup> *but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."*

The Bible says "*Weeping May Endure for a Night, But Joy is coming in the morning*"

The bible said "*No Weapon that is Formed against you shall be able to prosper*"

The Bible says "*The Lord is my Light and my Salvation, Whom shall I fear - The Lord is the Strength of my life of whom shall I be Afraid? When my enemies came to eat up my flesh they Stumbled and fell...*"

The Bible says "*Greater is he that is within you than he that is within the World*"

The Bible says "*All things Work together for the Good of those who Love the Lord and who are called according to his Purpose*"



### **“Did You Know? Pt. 5 Stand”**

Scripture Ephesians 6:10-20(NIV)

Sunday August 11, 2013

The Music of Sly & The Family Stone in their early years masterfully and magnificently magnified the importance of the average ordinary person in this mosaic called America.

Songs like “Everyday People” *“I am no better and neither are you, we are the same whatever we do – You love me, you hate me, you know me and then, you can’t figure out the bag I’m in – I am Everyday people – There is a long hair that doesn’t like the short hair, for being such a rich one that will not help the poor one – Different strokes for different folks, and so on and so on and Scooby dooby doo-bee – We’ve got to live together...”*

Songs like “Everybody is a Star,” and “You can make it if you try!” Songs about the complexity, of the connection between kin folk like “Family Affair.” And songs about Race relations in America like “Don’t Call me Nigger Whitey, don’t call me Whitey Nigger.”

But my personal favorite Sly & The Family Stone song is one that puts Steel in the back of those Struggling against Seemingly Insurmountable odds to hold their heads up as they forge forward in life.

That song is “Stand!” Some of the lyrics say *“Stand, in the end you’ll still be you; One that’s done all the things you set out to-*

*Stand, there’s a cross for you to bear, things you go through if you’re going anywhere-*

*Stand, you've been sitting much too long, there's a permanent crease in your right and wrong-*

*Stand, there's a midget standing tall and the giant beside him about to fall-*

*Stand, they will try to make you crawl and they know what you're saying makes sense at all-*

*Stand, don't you know that you are free; well at least in your mind, if you want to be!"*

And Sly & The Family Stone and that African Apostle, Gospel Globetrotter and Tent Maker from Tarsus The Apostle Paul both see something Spiritually Subversive about the powerless Standing up to the Powerful and in so doing Bringing down Strongholds.

When Paul Pens this Pamphlet of Prophetic Piety here in this Pericope of Ephesians 10 Paul does so from a Prison cell.

And just as the song "Stand" by Sly & The Family Stone was an Exhortation to individuals of socially inferior status to Stand against seemingly Superior opposition The Apostle Paul here in Ephesians Sounds the Trumpet of combat to Soldiers in the Army of King Immanuel to Stand!

This text is a Christian call to Arms against the enemies of the religion of Jesus of Nazareth who seek to Sabotage God's Love for the Least of these!

Beloved, I must pause here to pose the question from the hymn writer's anointed pen, "*Must I be carried to the skies on Flowery beds of ease, while others fought to win the prize and sailed through Bloody seas? Am I (Are you) a Soldier of the Cross?*"

This Text of Ephesians 10 is the Sound of Reveille in the Barracks of Believers to get on The Battlefield for my Lord!

Song says, *"I was alone and idle, I was a sinner too.*

*I heard a voice from heaven say there is work to do.*

*I took the Master's hand, and I joined the Christian band; I'm on the Battlefield for my Lord!"*

The Social Justice Gospel of Jesus of Nazareth is a Summons to the Saints of the Sovereign Lord to take up the battle for the cause of Jesus Christ against all forms of Tyranny and Oppression by Oppressors that Disallow, Disenfranchise and Disinherit the Powerless, Voiceless and Oppressed of the world!

In fact in just the first 4 verses of this text of Ephesians 10 Paul uses the word Stand 4 times emphasizing as Dr. King would say *"The Urgency of the Moment!"*

And so In verse 10 Paul says *"Finally, Be Strong in the Lord and in his Mighty Power."*

In other words for a Believer to Stand we must first make sure that we Stand Under the Authority of the Almighty!

*"Be Strong in The Lord..."* Not just Be Strong because your little Strength is not enough to carry the day!

*"Be Strong in The Lord and in the Power of God's Might."* If you Stand under your own Authority someone can easily over power you but if you Stand under the Authority of The Almighty there is no power that can overpower God's Authority!

Jesus said in John 10 *“No one can Snatch my Sheep out of my hand; My father who has given them to me is greater than all; No one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand, I and my Father are one!”*

First thing for the Believer to be able to Stand is that they must Stand Under the Authority of the Almighty!

Paul goes on to say Ephesians 6:11-12 (NIV)

*“Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”*

For the Follower of Jesus of Nazareth to be able to Stand we must choose to Stand up to the Satanic and Systemic Schemes of Evil and people animated by evil who seek to Sabotage the Will of God and Shackle the people of God!

When Paul says *“Our Struggle is not against flesh and Blood...”* Paul is NOT excusing problematic people and their penchant for being Petty and Persecuting other people.

Paul is pointing out that there are some people who (some of which enjoy Positions of Privilege) who have willingly Partnered with Evil to keep their privilege at the expense of other people who don’t have that same Privilege.

Paul is not saying that anyone can justly say *“The Devil Made me Do it...No!”* No The Devil may have Helped you do it...!

Let me give you some Real Talk today...Do you not know that there are some people who ain't happy unless they are either stirring up Mess, Passing on Mess (*Gossiping*) or Milking a Messy situation?

Did you know that Some Nice People do some Nasty things; So-called Clean people do some dirty things!

Can I Help somebody today? There are some people So Troublesome that they would give an Aspirin a Headache!

There are some people so mean that I believe the Devil Takes Advice from them!

Don't give all of it to the Devil; we are responsible for bad behavior.

Now that is not to say that evil does not have a major role here. Paul calls him "*The Devil*," some of you may call him "*Satan*," "The Evil one," "Beelzebub" or even "Mephistopheles..." Call him what you will but know this that there is the Presence of Evil in this world orchestrating the affairs of willing people.

Paul says that there is The Presence of Evil in some Privileged and Prestigious places wreaking havoc on the poor and powerless.

Evil and Wickedness has a way of Influencing, Instigating and Enticing some people to Engage in Idolatrous behavior for their personal benefit.

In other words some High Class People do some Low Class Things; Some Fine Minds think some Foul thoughts; So-called High Moral people do some Immoral things!

And many times it is because of the Love of Money – In fact to be real honest with you today; Money is the real American Religion!

When the CEO of Wal-Mart threatens to close his store in Washington DC because the City Council has voted to require Wal-Mart to pay its workers a Living Wage

of \$10.00 an hour when that same CEO makes \$11 thousand Dollars every minute we are talking about wickedness!

When Republican Governors (like the one here in Indiana) refuse to accept the money from the Affordable Care Act (Obama Care) which would make sure that thousands of people have good healthcare that is Evil.

And when the City Council of Gary Indiana voted to support the Community Benefits Agreement and would require that the RDA accept the agreement so that the people in Gary can go to work on good paying Construction jobs at their Airport but Black Elected Officials refuse to make the RDA sign it that is Diabolical!

\*\*\*Footnote – We will be calling for the Defunding of the RDA unless they immediately sign the CBA\*\*\*

To be a Follower of The Social Gospel of Jesus of Nazareth means Standing Under the Authority of the Almighty, it also means Choosing to Stand up to the Satanic and Systemic Schemes of Evil and people animated by evil who seek to Sabotage the Will of God and Shackle the people of God!

But Ultimately this Stand Requires that Soldiers of the Savior Be Properly Suited Up for the Struggle!

You can't fight this fight in Street Clothes, Paul says Suit Up!

You can't endure this engagement in everyday attire, Suit Up!

You can't hold firm in this fight in flimsy fashionable outfits, Suit Up!

Paul says "Ephesians 6:13-14 (NIV)

*"Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be*

*able to stand your ground...”(Not like the law legalizing Murder that got George Zimmerman off –*

2 Corinthians 10:4 *“For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds...”* 1 Samuel 17:45 (NIV)

*“David said to the Philistine, “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied...For the Battle Is The Lord’s!”*

Paul says *“And after you have done everything, to stand. (Suit Up!) Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist...”* In this world of Disinformation, Misinformation and Mendacity you will need the Truth to hold you!

Brace yourself with the Belt of Truth against the Lies and Deceit both in the Church and out; Lies from Pulpit Pimps and Political Panderers; Lies from Backward Ideology and Bad Theology – Brace yourself with the Belt of Truth!

Suit Up! Your Heart will get broken by people you tried to Help – Paul says that you will need *“The Breast Plate of Righteousness”* so that your heart won’t grow cold, so that you don’t lose the fire and forsake your first love because of ungrateful insensitive people!

Suit Up, with your Feet Fitted with the Gospel of Peace! That Peace that Passes all understanding!

Be ready with your Feet Fitted with the gospel of Peace to share with anyone, anywhere your testimony about what God has done for you!

*“How Beautiful on the Mountains are the feet of those who bring Good News, who proclaim Peace & Salvation...Who says to Zion, Your God Reigns!”*

Then Take Up, *“The Shield Of Faith to extinguish all the Flaming Arrows of the Evil One.”*

The Shield is what you carry and you will need to take your Faith where ever you go because there will always be somebody shooting Darts at you; Darts at your Dreams; Darts at your goals; Darts at your Great Expectations; Darts at your Hopes; Darts at your Labors; Darts at your joy!

In fact sometimes all you will have is your Faith; Family will fall out with you; Friends will Forsake you and sometimes it will seem like even God has forgotten you but Faith will see you through!

There will be times when your faith may have to Whisper to your Hope because your Hope is finding it hard to Hold on!

Faith will help you Trust God’s Heart when you can’t Trace God’s hands!

*“Why Are you Downcast, O my Soul? Why are you so disturbed within me? Hope Thou In God; For I shall yet praise him, my Savior and my God!”*

Suit Up, by putting on *“the Helmet Of Salvation...”*

You need that Helmet of Salvation to Remind you that you are not descended from Slaves and a Subservient people – *“Slavery is not African History. Slavery Interrupted African history!”*

Folks will mess up your mind if you are not careful; they will try to make you think that you are crazy for actually believing that *“All things are Possible with God...”*

You know what gets me? It is when I hear Church folks tell me, “Now Rev., I’m just being real, we ain’t Jesus you know – You can’t really expect us to do what Jesus



did, take what Jesus took and live like Jesus lived.” Beloved either Jesus is real or he ain’t!

And my Jesus said in John 14:12 (NIV)

*“I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father.”*

Suit Up, finally Paul says with the *“Sword of The Spirit which is the Word of God!”*

Beloved Soldiers in the Army of King Immanuel are on the move! I don’t know about you but I am Proud to be a Line Officer to the Captain of my Salvation!

You see when the Smoke Clears, and the Dust Settles I know who will ultimately be victorious, in this Life!

Because *“No Lie can Live forever,”* and *“Truth Crushed to Earth will Rise again!”*

You need to learn to *“Rightly handle the Word of God...”* which is the Sword of the Spirit!

You need God’s word to Guide you when you are Lost; to Strengthen you when you are weak; To Correct you when you miss the mark; To Challenge you when you become too Comfortable –

*“How can a young man (or Young woman) keep their way pure?” “By living according to your word...I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.”*

*“Thy Word is a Lamp unto my feet and light unto my path...” “Order my steps in thy Word dear Lord, Lead me, guide me, every day, Send your anointing, father I pray, Order my Steps in your Word!”*

But Get this all of that armor is for the front – So what about your back?

God’s got your back!!!

So STAND knowing that the God of Eternal Glory has your Back

STAND because God’s got your side, your front, over your head and under your feet as well!

STAND, for Justice in an Unjust World

STAND, for Love when people don’t want to be Loved and don’t want to love

STAND, When the Storms of Life are raging

STAND, when the World is Tossing you like a Ship upon the Sea

STAND, When Troubles Shake and Friends Forsake

STAND, when Health Fails and Frustration Abounds

STAND, when the Night is Long and Clouds are Heavy

STAND, when life lets you down and Worry is on the rise

STAND, when Nobody understands

STAND, when your Strength gives out and your Body is Weak

STAND, even when Nobody STANDS with you

STAND, when you feel like Giving up and throwing in the Towel

After you done all that you can STAND, STAND, STAND

What do you do When you’ve Given your ALL, STAND!

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Armah, Ayi Kwei. *Two Thousand Seasons*. Oxford, NY: Heinemann, 1973.
- Branch, Taylor. *Parting The Waters: America In The King Years*. New York, NY: Touchstone, 1988.
- Brueggemann, Walter. *The Prophetic Imagination*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001.
- Calumet Township Trustees, accessed March 2012, [www.calumettpw-in.gov](http://www.calumettpw-in.gov).
- Carruthers, Jacob H. *Intellectual Warfare*. Chicago, IL: Third World Press, 1999.
- Cone, James H. *God of the Oppressed*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997.
- DuBois, W. E. B. *The Souls Of Black Folk*. New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1994.
- Federal Bureau of Investigation, "FBI Uniform Crime Report," accessed March 2012, [www.fbi.gov](http://www.fbi.gov).
- "Gary Indiana Facts," accessed May 7, 2012, [www.citydata.com/zipmaps/Gary-Indiana](http://www.citydata.com/zipmaps/Gary-Indiana).
- "Gary Takes over as murder capital of US," Chicago Tribune, January 3, 1994, accessed May 5, 2012, <http://www.Chicagotribune.com>.
- Hendricks, Obery M. Jr. *The Politics Of Jesus: Rediscovering The True Revolutionary Nature Of Jesus' Teachings And How They Have Been Corrupted*. New York, NY: Three Leaves Press, 2006.
- Hollyday, Joyce. *On The Heels Of Freedom: The American Missionary Association's Bold Campaign To Educate Minds, Open Hearts, And Heal The Soul Of A Divided Nation*. New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2005.
- King, Martin Luther Jr., *Why We Can't Wait*. New York, NY: Mentor, 1963.
- Lovell, John Jr., *Black Song: The Forge And The Flame, The Story of How the Afro-American Spiritual was Hammered Out*. London, UK: MacMillan Company, 1972.

- Metzger, Bruce M. and Roland E. Murphy, eds. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: Containing The Old And New Testaments*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Millender (Dolly) Dharathula. *Images of America: Gary's Central Business Community*. Gary IN: Arcadia Publishing 2003. 8-9.
- Proctor, Samuel DeWitt. *The Substance of Things Hoped For: A Memoir of African-American Faith*. New York, NY: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1995.
- Rauschenbusch, Walter. *Christianity And The Social Crisis in the 21st Century*. ed. Paul Rauschenbusch. New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2007.
- \_\_\_\_\_. Walter Rauschenbusch, *The Social Principles of Jesus*. New York, NY: The Woman's Press, 1917.
- Stats Indiana, "Lake County Indiana In-Depth Profile," accessed March 2012, [www.stats.indiana.edu/profile](http://www.stats.indiana.edu/profile).
- Thurman, Howard. *Jesus and the Disinherited*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1976.
- USA Today/Nation 5/19/2011.
- Washington, James Melvin. *Testament Of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1986.
- Welchel, L. H. Jr. *The History & Heritage of African-American Churches: A Way Out of No Way*. St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2011.
- Wilmore, Gayraud S. *Black Religion And Black Radicalism: An Interpretation of the Religious History of Afro-American People*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis eBooks, 1983.
- Wright, Jeremiah A. Jr. *A Sankofa Moment: The History of Trinity United Church of Christ*. Dallas, TX: Saint Paul Press, 2010.